Mrs Tree's Will

Laura E. Richards

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MRS. TREE'S WILL

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By

LAURA E. RICHARDS

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MRS. TREE'S WILL

By
Laura E. Richards
Author of
"Captain January," "Melody," "Marie," "Mrs. Tree," etc.

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MRS. TREE'S WILL

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TO

MY DAUGHTER

Alice

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MRS. TREE'S WILL

CHAPTER I.

THE WILL ITSELF

"SUPPOSE you tell me all about it, Mr. Hollopeter!" said Mr. Bliss.

Mr. Homer Hollopeter sighed deeply; wiped his brow with a sky-blue article, evidently under the impression that it was a pocket-handkerchief; sighed again yet more deeply on perceiving that it was a necktie; put it back in his pocket, and looked plaintively at the minister.

"I should be pleased to do so, Mr. Bliss," he said. "It would be — a relief; a — an

unburdening; an — outlet to imprisoned nature."

"You see," the little minister went on soothingly, "our dear old friend's death occurring while I was away, and I returning only just in time for the funeral, I have not really heard the particulars yet. I might — that is — Mrs. Weight kindly called on me last evening, probably with a view to giving me some information, but I was unable to see her, and I should prefer to hear from you how it all happened."

"Yes — a — yes!" said Mr. Homer, nervously. "Mrs. Weight is a — a person — a — in short, she is a person not connected with the family. Well, Mr. Bliss, the end came very suddenly; very suddenly indeed. It was a great shock; a great — blow; a great — unsettling of the equilibrium of daily life. The village has never known such a sensation, sir, never."

"Mrs. Tree died in the evening, I believe?" said Mr. Bliss.

"At nine o'clock, sir," said Mr. Homer. "Jocko, the parrot, had had some trifling indisposition, and Cousin Marcia had sent for Miss Penelope Pardon, who, as you are doubtless aware, has some knowledge of the feathered tribes and their peculiar ailments. It chanced that I came in to bring a letter, which would, I fancied, give Cousin Marcia singular pleasure. It was from little Vesta — I would say from Mrs. Geoffrey Strong, Mr. Bliss: she has always been a favorite niece — grandniece, I should say, of Mrs. Tree. I found my cousin somewhat excited; she was speaking to Miss Pardon with emphasis, and, as I entered, she struck the floor with her stick and said: 'Cat's foot! don't tell me! folderol!' and other expressions of that nature, as was her custom when moved. Seeing me, she turned upon me with some

abruptness and addressed me in the following words: 'Well, Homer, here you are mooning about as usual. You ought to be in a cage, and have Penny to take care of you. How would you like this for a cage?' She waved her stick round the room, and then, grasping it nervously, shook it at me with violence.

"'Homer Hollopeter,' she said, 'what is the name of this village?'

"Somewhat startled at this outburst, I repeated her remark. 'The name, Cousin Marcia?'

"'The name!' she said, violently. 'The real name! out with it, ninnyhammer!'

"I replied firmly, — it is a point on which I have always felt strongly, Mr. Bliss, — 'The real name of this village, Cousin Marcia, is Quahaug.'

"Mrs. Tree sat bolt upright in her chair. 'Homer Hollopeter,' she said, 'you have

some sense, after all! Hooray for Quahaug!'

"Mr. Bliss, they were her last words. She sat looking at me, erect, vivacious, the very picture of life; and the next instant the stick dropped from her hand. She was gone, sir. The spirit had — departed; — a — removed itself; — a — winged its way to the empyrean."

He paused, half-drew out the blue necktie, then replaced it hurriedly.

"It was a great shock," he said; "I shall never be the same man again, never! Miss Pardon was most kind and attentive. She supplied me with — a — volatile salts, and in other ways ministered to my outer man till I was somewhat restored; but the inner man, sir, the — a — rainbow-hued spirit, as the poet has it, is — a — bruised; is — a — battered; is — a — marked with the impress of a grievous blow. At my age I can

hardly hope to recover the equilibrium which — "

"Come! come! Mr. Hollopeter," said the little minister; "you must not be despondent. Consider, our dear old friend had rounded out her century; the ripe fruit dropped quietly from the bough. It is true that her loss is a grievous one to all our community."

"It is, sir! it is, sir!" said Mr. Homer. "To imagine this community without Cousin Marcia is to imagine the hive without its queen; the — a — flock without its leader; the — a — finny tribe — but this is not a metaphor which can be pursued, Mr. Bliss; and, indeed, I see our friends even now approaching to join in the ceremony — a — the — I may say solemnity, which we have come hither to observe."

The foregoing conversation was held in Mrs. Tree's parlor. I say Mrs. Tree's, ad-

visedly, for, though the bright, energetic spirit that had so lately held sway there was gone, her presence still remained to fill the room. Indeed, this room, with its dim antique richness, its glimmer of gold lacquer, its soft duskiness of brocade and damask, its treasures of rare and precious woods, and, above all, its fragrance of sandalwood and roses, had always seemed the fit and perfect setting for the ancient jewel it held. To the poetic imagination of Mr. Homer Hollopeter, Mrs. Tree had always seemed out of place elsewhere. He had almost grudged the occasions, rare of late years, when she went abroad in her camel's-hair shawl and her great velvet bonnet. There seemed no reason why she should ever stir from her high-backed chair of carved ebony. He saw her in it at this moment, almost as plainly as he had seen her three days ago; the tiny satin-clad figure, erect, alert, the little hands

resting on the ebony crutch-stick, the eyes darting black fire, the lips uttering pungent words that bit like cayenne pepper, yet were wholesome in their biting, — was it possible that she was no longer there? Mr. Homer had feared his cousin Marcia more than any earthly thing, but still he had loved her sincerely; and now the tears were in his mild blue eyes as he turned from this vision of her to greet the incoming guests. Since the death of Doctor Stedman and his dear wife the year before, Mr. Homer was Mrs. Tree's only kinsman living in the village, and Doctor Strong, now staying at the Blyth house with his wife, had begged him to take up his quarters at Mrs. Tree's for the present. He had a special reason for asking it, he said. Mr. Homer would find out later what it was. So, meekly and sadly, Mr. Homer had brought a limp carpet-bag, and asked Direxia Hawkes, the old servant, to put him

wherever it would be least inconvenient; and the old woman, half-blind with weeping, had fiercely made ready the best bedroom, and was trying with bitter energy to feed him to death.

Who are these who enter the quiet room, greeting Mr. Homer with a silent nod or a low-toned word or two? We know most of them. First come Dr. Geoffrey Strong and Vesta, his wife, a noble-looking pair. Geoffrey holds his head as high, and his eyes are as bright and keen as ever; and, if a silver thread shows here and there in his crisp brown hair, Vesta thinks him none the less handsome for that. There is no silver in Vesta's own hair; the tawny masses are as beautiful as ever. Her figure is a little fuller, as becomes the mother of four. Geoffrey tells the children in confidence that their mother is the exact counterpart of the Venus of Milo, and says he has no doubt that the

latter lady had tawny hair. Vesta has put on a simple black dress, but there is no special sign of "mourning" about it.

"If anybody puts on crape for me," Mrs. Tree used to say, "I'll get up and pull it off 'em. So now they know. Nasty, unhealthy stuff! There's a piece to go on the door. Tommy Candy knows where it is; and that's all I'll have."

Here is Tommy Candy now, a tall lad of twenty, walking lame and leaning on a stick; his hair, which used to stand up in stiff spikes all over his head, is brought under some control, but there is no suppressing the twinkle in his gray eyes. Even now, when he is in sincere grief for his best friend, his eyes will twinkle as he looks out of the window and sees the elephantine form of Mrs. Weight lumbering up the garden path. And who is this behind her? Talk of crape, — why, here is a figure literally swathed in it.

The heavy veil is only pushed aside to give play to a handkerchief with an inch-deep black border, which is pressed to the eyes; a sob shakes the buxom figure. Who is this grief-smitten lady? Why, this is Mrs. Maria Darracott Pryor, Mrs. Tree's own and only lawful niece, the Next of Kin. She brushes past Vesta and her husband with a curt nod, rustles across the room, and lays her head on the arm of the ebony chair. At this Homer Hollopeter and Geoffrey Strong both start from their seats. Mr. Homer's gentle eyes gleam with unaccustomed fire; he opens his mouth to speak, but closes it again; for the intruder stops — falters — gives a scared look about her, and, tottering back, subsides on a sofa at the side of the room. Here she sobs ostentatiously behind her handkerchief, and takes eager note of the rest of the company.

She was followed by Mrs. Deacon Weight,

from across the way, whom Direxia admitted "this once!" as she said to herself with silent ferocity; William Jaquith and his lovely wife; finally, the lawyer, a brisk, dapper little man, who came in quickly, sat down by the violet-wood table, and proceeded without delay to open his budget.

"I, Marcia Darracott Tree, being of sound mind, which is more than most folks I know are —"

There was a movement, slight but general, among the company. No one quite smiled, but the faces of those who had loved Mrs. Tree lightened, while those of the others stiffened into a rigidity of disapproval. To one and all it seemed as if the ancient woman were speaking to them. The little lawyer paused and gave a quick glance around the room.

"It may be well for me to state in the beginning," he said, "that this instrument,

though beyond question irregular in its form of expression, is — equally beyond question — perfectly regular in its substance; an entirely valid instrument. To resume: 'of sound mind,' — I need not repeat the excursus, — 'do hereby dispose of my various belongings, all of which are absolutely and without qualification within my own control and possession, in the following manner, to wit, namely, and any other folderol this man may want to put in.' Ahem! My venerable friend was very pleasant with me while I was drawing up this instrument, — very pleasant; but she insisted on my writing her exact words.

"'To Vesta Strong I give and bequeath my jewels, with the exceptions hereinafter specified; my lace; the velvet and satin dresses in the cedar chests; the camel's-hair shawls; the silver, both Darracott and Tree; and anything else in the house that she may

fancy, with the exceptions hereinafter mentioned. She'd better not clutter up her house with too many things; it is full enough already, with Blyth and Meredith truck.

"'To Geoffrey Strong I give any of my books that he likes, except the blue Keats; the engraved sapphire ring, and fifty thousand dollars.

"'Homer Hollopeter is to have the blue morocco Keats, presented by the author to my father, because he has always wanted it and never expected to get it.'"

The tears brimmed over in Mr. Homer's eyes. "I certainly never did expect this," he said, with emotion. "I have held the precious volume in my hands reverently — a — humbly — a — with abasement of spirit, but I never thought to possess it. I am indeed overcome. Pardon the interruption, sir, I beg of you."

The lawyer gave Mr. Homer a look, half-

quizzical, half-compassionate. "Your name occurs again in this instrument, Homer," he said; "I will not say more at present. To resume:

"'To Direxia Hawkes I give five thousand dollars and a home in this house as long as she lives, on condition that she never cleans more than one room in it at a time, and that she makes the orange cordial every year according to my rule, without making any fool changes.'"

Direxia Hawkes, a tiny withered brownie, had been standing by the door since she admitted the last comer. She now threw her apron over her head and began to sob. "Did you ever?" she cried. "Tell me that woman is dead! She's more alive than the hull bilin' of this village, I tell you. Sixty years I've been trying to get a mite of ginger into that cordial, and now I never shall. There! I don't want to no more, now she ain't

here to tell me I sha'n't. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!"

Vesta Strong went to the old woman's side and comforted her tenderly. The sobs died away into sniffs, and the lawyer continued:

"'To William Jaquith I leave twenty thousand dollars and the house he now occupies; also all the property, real and personal, of my grandson, Arthur Blyth, deceased.

"'To my niece, Maria Darracott Pryor,'" — the little lawyer paused and glanced over his spectacles. With each of the bequests enumerated, Mrs. Pryor had become more and more rigid. The black-edged handkerchief was forgotten, and she sat with her chin raised and her prominent short-sighted eyes glancing from one to another of the fortunate legatees with an expression which, to say the least, was not affectionate.

"From envy, hatred, and malice," Geoffrey had whispered a moment before.

"Hush, Geoffrey," said Vesta.

But at the mention of her own name, Mrs. Pryor's expression changed; the rigor yielded to a drooping softness; she heaved a deep sigh and raised the handkerchief to her eyes again.

"Dearest Cousin Marcia!" she murmured; "she remembered even in her closing moments that I was her next of kin; so touching. The Darracott blood — "

"'To my niece, Maria Darracott Pryor, I give and bequeath — the sum of — three dollars and sixty-seven cents, being the price of a ticket back where she came from. If she tries to stay in my house, tell her to remember the *last time.*'

"I greatly regret these discourteous observations," said the little lawyer, deprecatingly, "but my venerable friend was — a —

positively determined on inserting them, and I had no alternative, I assure you."

He looked with some alarm at Mrs. Pryor as he spoke, and, indeed, that lady's countenance was dreadful to look upon. Every part of her seemed to clink and crackle as she rose to her feet, her eyes snapping, her teeth fairly chattering with rage.

"You call this a will, do you?" she cried. "You call this law, do you? We'll see about that. We'll see if the next of kin is to be insulted and trodden upon by a low attorney and a set of beggars on horseback. We'll see —"

But the little lawyer, who came from the neighboring town, had gone to the Academy with Maria Darracott, and, though a man of punctilious courtesy, had no idea of being called a low attorney by any such person. He therefore interrupted her with scant ceremony.

"We must, I fear, postpone discussion," he said, "until the instrument has been heard in its entirety by all present. To resume."

Mrs. Pryor glanced about her with challenging eyes and heaving breast, but, seeing that no one paid much heed to her, all looks being bent on the reader, she subsided once more into her seat, a statue of vindictive protest.

"'To Thomas Candy I give five thousand dollars, and another five thousand dollars on his attaining the age of twenty-five if he shall have been able by that time to carry out the plan and maintain the condition now to be specified.'"

The little lawyer paused again and glanced round the expectant circle. His shrewd brown face was immovable, but his black eyes twinkled in spite of himself.

"I have already observed," he said, "that

this instrument is an unusual, I may say, a singular one. My venerable friend was most emphatic in her enunciation of the following — a — condition, which — which I forbear to characterize." He glanced at the empty chair. One would have thought that for him it was not empty. Then he went on:

"'The condition now to be specified.

"'To Homer Hollopeter and Thomas Candy I give and bequeath this house and garden, the furniture, etc. (after Vesta Strong has taken what she wants), the collections of foreign woods, uncut gems, butterflies, carved ivories, natural curiosities, shells, coins, etc., etc., etc., to be held by them in trust, and arranged by them as a museum for the perpetual benefit of this village; and I give them over and above the before mentioned legacies two thousand dollars yearly for the maintenance of this

museum and for additions thereto: all this on condition that this village shall resume and maintain its original and true name of Quahaug, which it would never have lost if Captain Tree and I had not been in the South Seas while that old noddy, Melancthon Swain, was minister here.

"'All the rest and residue of my estate I give and bequeath to the aforesaid Homer Hollopeter, and I appoint him my residuary legatee, and I hope there's fuss enough about it.'"

The little lawyer stopped reading and pushed back his chair. In doing so, he may have inadvertently touched the empty chair, for at that instant an ebony crutch-stick, which had been leaning against it, fell forward on the floor with a loud rattle. Mrs. Pryor shrieked and fell into real and violent hysterics. She was supported out of

the room by Doctor Strong and his wife. Mrs. Weight rolled out after them, snorting indignant sympathy, and the assembly broke up in confusion.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT THE MEN SAID

I HAVE elsewhere described the village post-office, both as it appeared at the time of Mr. Homer Hollopeter's election as postmaster and as later adorned and beautified by him.[1] It had been a labor of love with Mr. Homer, not only to make the office itself pleasant, to transform it, as he said, "into a fitting shrine for the genius of epistolary intercourse," but to make the outside of the building pleasant to the eye. Clematis and woodbine were trained up the walls and round the windows, and the once forlorn-looking veranda was a veritable bower of morning-glory and climbing roses.

[1] "Mrs. Tree."

On this veranda, the day after the reading of Mrs. Tree's will, the village elders were gathered, as was their custom, awaiting the arrival of the afternoon mail. They sat in a row, their chairs tilted back against the wall, their faces set seaward. The faces were all grave, and a certain solemnity seemed to brood over the little assembly. From time to time one or another would take his pipe from his mouth, and the others would look at him doubtfully, as if half-expecting a remark, but the pipe would be replaced in silence. At length Salem Rock, a massive gray-haired man of dignified and sober aspect, spoke.

"Well, boys," he said, "somebody's got to say something, and, as nobody else seems inclined, I s'pose it's up to me as the oldest here. Not but what I feel like a child to-day, — a little mite of a child. Boys, this village has met with a great loss."

There was a general murmur of "That's so!" "It has." "That's what it's met with!"

"I can't seem to sense it!" Salem Rock continued. "I can't seem to make it anyways real, that Mis' Tree is gone. I can't help but think that if I went there to that house to-day, as I was free to go any time I wanted anything as good advice could give — or help either — or anybody else in this village as ever needed anything — I can't help but think that if I went there to that house to-day I should find Mis' Tree sittin' in her chair, chirk as a chipmunk, and hear her say, 'Now, Salem Rock, what mischief have you been up to?' I was allus a boy to her — we was all boys."

"That's so!" the chorus murmured again. "That was what we was; boys!"

"And when I think," Salem Rock went on, "that I shall never more so go and so

find her again — sittin' in that chair — nor hear her so speak — I tell you, boys, it breaks me all up; it doos so."

Again there was a sympathetic murmur; heads were shaken, and feet shuffled uneasily. The men were all glad to have a voice for their grief, but all had not the gift of speech.

"I remember" — Salem Rock was still the speaker; he was a slow, thoughtful man, and gathered momentum as he went on — "the first time ever I saw Mis' Tree, to remember it. I couldn't ha' been more than six years old, and I was sittin' in the front dooryard makin' mud pies, and she came in on some errand to mother. Mother used to spin yarn for her, same as my woman does now — did, I'm obleeged to say. Wal, she had on her grand bunnit and shawl, and I had never seen nothin' like her before. Ma'rm never took me to meetin' till I was seven, and she showed judgment. Wal, sirs,

that ancient woman — she wasn't ancient then, of course, but yet she wasn't young, and she appeared ancient to me — looked me over, and spoke up sharp and crips. 'Stand up, boy,' she says, 'and take your hat off; quick!'

"I tell ye, there didn't no grass grow under me! I was up fast as my legs could scramble.

"'That's right!' she says; 'always stand up and take off your hat when a lady comes into the yard.'

"'Be you a lady?' says I. Lord knows what kind of notion I had; children don't always know what they are saying.

"'I am the Queen of the Cannibal Islands!' says she.

"I never misdoubted but what she was, and I didn't know what Cannibal Islands meant.

"'What's your name?' says I.

"'I'll tell you what my husband's name is,' says she. 'His name is

"'Chingy Fungy Wong,
Putta-potee da Kubbala Kong,
Flipperty Flapperty Busky Bong,
The King of the Cannibal Islands.'

"Then she went into the house, and I stood starin' after her with my mouth gappin' open. She didn't stay long, and, when she came out again, up I jumps without waitin' to be told. She looks at me ag'in, that quick way she had, like a bird. 'Finished your pie?' says she.

"'Yes'm,' says I.

"'Is it a good pie?' says she.

"'I guess so!' says I.

"'I'll buy it,' says she. 'Here's the money!' and she gives me a bright new ten-cent piece, — it was the first ever I had in my life, — and walked off quick and light

before ever I could say a word. Well, now, sirs, if children ain't cur'us things! I was a slow child most ways, — ben slow all my life long, but it come over me then quick as winkin', she had paid for that pie, and it was hers, and she'd got to have it. I never said a word, but just toddled after down street, holdin' that mud pie as if it was Thanksgivin' mince. I couldn't catch up with her; she walked almighty fast them days, and my legs were short, but I kep' her red shawl in sight, and I see where she went in. Time I got up to the door it was shut, but I banged on it in good shape, and D'reckshy Hawkes come and opened it. She was allus sharp, D'reckshy was, and she couldn't abide no boys but her two, as she called 'em, Arthur and Willy, and they weren't neither one of 'em born then.

"'What do you want, boy?' she says, sharp enough.

"'I don't want nothin'!' says I. 'I brung the pie.'

"'What pie?' says she.

"'Her'n,' says I. 'She bought it off'n me; her that went in just now, with the red shawl.'

"D'reckshy looked me over, and looked at the pie. I make no doubt but she was just goin' to send me about my business, but before she could speak I heard Mis' Tree's voice. She had seen me from the window, I expect.

"'D'reckshy Hawkes,' she says, 'take that pie into the pantry and send the child to me.'

"'My sakes, Mis' Tree!' said D'reckshy, 'it ain't a pie; it's a *mud* pie!'

"'Do as I tell you!' says Mis' Tree, and D'reckshy went; but she give me a shove toward the parlor door, and there I see Mis' Tree sittin' in her chair. That was the

first time. Well, sirs, we are all perishable clay."

Another silence fell; the pensive pipes puffed; the keen eyes scanned the prospect.

"Looks as if 'twas tryin' to git up some kind o' weather out there!" said Seth Weaver.

"Doos so!" responded Ebenezer Hoppin. "It's ben tryin' two-three days, but it don't seem to have no pertickler *success*."

"Old Mis' Tree hadn't no use for weather," said Jordan Tooke. "Some women-folks are scairt to death of a rain-storm; you'd think they were afraid of washin' out themselves, same as they be about their clo'es; but she wa'n't that kind; rain or snow, shine or shower, she did what she had a mind to.

"'Weather never took no heed of me,' she used to say, 'and I ain't goin' to take no heed of it.' No more she did!"

Seth Weaver shook his head, with a reminiscent chuckle. "Ever hear what she said to that feller that come here one time from Salt Marsh and druv the ten-cent team a spell?"

The others shook their heads and turned toward him with an air of relief. Collective sorrow is embarrassing to men.

"There wa'n't much to him," said Seth, "and what there was was full half the time. He didn't stay here long. This village didn't appreciate him the way he liked to be appreciated. Wal, it was snowin' one day, quite a storm it was, and Mis' Tree had sent for him, — Anthony bein' laid up or somethin'. Ezra Doolittle — that was his name, and it suited him — had bit off more jobs than he could swaller, and when he got round to Mis' Tree's he was half an hour late, and she told him so pretty plain. He had just enough liquor aboard to make him saucy.

'Wal,' he says, 'you're lucky to git me at all. I've druv from Hell to Jerusalem to git here now.'

"Mis' Tree was all ready for him; she spoke up quick as kindlin': 'You'll git back quicker,' she says, ''cause you know the way.'

"I was just drivin' by on my milk route, and she caught sight of me.

"'Seth,' she says, 'I want to go to Mis' Jaquith's. Can you take me?'

"'I'd be pleased to,' says I, 'if you don't mind the pung, Mis' Tree.'

"She was into that pung before you could say 'sausage!'

"'Whip up!' she says; 'get ahead of that feller!' and I laid into my old mare, and off we went kingdom-comin' down the ro'd, me in my old red pung and my buffalo coat, and Mis' Tree in her velvet bunnit and fur cloak, and that feller standin' in the ro'd

with his mouth open, same as you were, Salem, with your mud pie. Well, sir, that was a meal o' victuals for me. I sent the old mare along for all she was wuth, and we got down to Jaquiths' inside of ten minutes. Pretty good time, considerin' what the ro'd was. Got there, and out that old lady hops like a girl.

"'Good boy, Seth!' she says.

"She wanted to give me a dollar, 'cause she had taken me off my route, but I says, 'I guess not, Mis' Tree!' I says. 'I've ben layin' for you ever since you helped mother when she had the fever, and now I've got my chance!' So she laughs and says, call for her on my way back, and I did; but when I found a fourteen-pound turkey sittin' up against my door Christmas mornin', — I wasn't buyin' turkeys that year myself, — I knowed where it come from, and no words said. But what took me was the way she

spoke up to that feller. Now some women would have complained, and some would have scol't, and they'd all have gone with the feller 'eause he had a eovered team, — but not she! 'You'll get back quicker,' she says, 'from knowin' the way!' and into my team like a flash. Gorry! that's the kind of woman I like to see."

"You'll never see another like her!" said Salem Rock. "The likes of Mis' Tree never has ben seen and never will be seen, not in this deestrick. Her tongue was as quick as her heart was kind, and when you say that you've said all there is to say. I s'pose there ain't one of us but could tell a dozen stories like yours, Seth. I dunno as it's proper to tell 'em just now," he paused; "and yet," he continued, "I dunno *but* it is. She was — so to say — she was all of a piece. You can't think of her without the sharp way she had."

"That's so," Seth assented; "that's so every time. There wa'n't nobody thought more of Mis' Tree than what I did, but yet what keeps comin' up to me ever since she was laid away is them quick, sharp kind o' things she'd say. Now take what she said to Mis' Nudd, Isril Nudd's widder. You all know what Isril was; he was mean as dirt and sour as pickles. He'd scrimped his wife, and he'd half-starved her, and some said he'd beat her, but I never knew how that was. Anyway, Marthy Nudd had as poor a time of it as any woman in this village, and everybody knew it. And yet, when he died she mourned for him as if he was Moses and Simeon and the Angel Gabriel all in one. Well, she come to Mis' Tree beggin' for the loan of some shawl or bunnit or toggery to wear, I dunno what; and she was goin' on about her poor husband, and how she had tried to do her duty by him,

and hoped he knew it now he was in heaven, and all that kind of talk. Old Mis' Tree let her say about so much and then she stopped her. You know the way she'd hit the floor with her stick. Rap! that stick would go, and any one's heart would sit right up in their boosum.

"'That'll do, Marthy!' she says. 'Now listen to me. You say Isril is in heaven?'

"'Oh, yes'm, yes, Mis' Tree,' says Marthy. 'He's numbered with the blest, I don't make no doubt on it.'

"'And you've got the four hundred dollars life insurance that you told me was due?'

"'Yes'm, that's all safe; my brother's put it in the bank for me.'

"'Very well, Marthy Nudd; if you've got Isril into heaven and got four hundred dollars life insurance on him, that's the best piece of work ever you done in your life,

or ever will do. Cat's foot!' she says; 'folderol!' she says, 'don't talk to me!' and she shoved her out with her stick and wouldn't hear another word. Gorry! I wouldn't ben Marthy Nudd — "

"Didn't hurt Marthy none, I expect," said Ebenezer Hoppin. "She's one of them kind, sorter betwixt putty and Injia rubber; you can double her up easy, but first thing you know she's out smooth again. Some say she's liable to marry Elihu Wick, over to the Corner. She'd find him some different from Isril."

"What kind of feller is he?" asked Jordan Tooke.

"Oh, a string and shingle man. Give him pork and give him sunset, and he won't ask nothin' more. Marthy won't get no four hundred dollars insurance on him, but he'll go to heaven all right. There isn't a mite

o' harm in 'Lihu, and Marthy has earned her rest, I will say."

"Speakin' of insurance," said Salem, slowly, "reminds me we ain't said anything about Mis' Tree's will. It is a sing'lar will, boys."

There was a moment's pause. Heads were shaken and feet were shuffled uneasily.

"Mighty sing'lar," said Hiram Gray.

"Beats all I ever heard of," said Jordan Tooke.

Seth Weaver kept a loyal silence. Salem gave him a look, and, receiving a nod in reply, went on:

"Seth and myself was talkin' it over as we came along, kinder takin' our bearin's, and this is the way it looks to us. Mis' Tree was born in this village, and lived in it a hundred and two years, and died in it; and her folks, the Trees and the Darracotts, have lived and died here since there was a

village to die in. Not one of them hundred 'n' two years — since she was of knowledgeable age, — but she was doin' good — in her own way — from the first day of January to the last day of December. Not one of us sittin' here on this piazzy but she's done good *to,* one way or another. Therefore and thereon-account of — " Salem was obviously and justifiably proud of this phrase, and repeated it with evident enjoyment; " therefore and thereon-account of, I say, and Seth says with me, that if Mis' Tree wanted this village should be called Cat's-foot, or Fiddlesticks, or Folderol, or Fudge, I for one and he for another would give our votes to have it so called."

A confusion of tongues ensued, some agreeing, some protesting, but, while the discussion was at its height, the stage drove up and the day's session was over.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT THE WOMEN SAID

A FEW days after this, the Ladies' Society met at the house of Miss Bethia Wax. There had been much discussion among the members of the Society as to whether it were fitting to hold a meeting so soon after the death of the foremost woman of the parish. Mrs. Worritt said she for one would be loth to be found wanting in respect for one who had been, as it were, a mile-stone and a beacon-light in that village. Mrs. Weight, on the other hand, maintained that business was business, and that the heathen in their blindness needed flannel petticoats just as much as they did last week. Miss

Wax herself, a lady with a strong sense of the proprieties, was in doubt as to which course would preserve them most strictly. Finally the matter was submitted to Mrs. Geoffrey Strong for decision.

"There is only one wish in my mind, Vesta," said Miss Wax, "and that is to show the highest respect for our venerable friend, and I speak, I am sure, for the whole Society. The question is, how best *to* show it."

Vesta Strong reflected a moment. "I think, Miss Wax," she said, "it will be wisest to hold the meeting. I am quite sure Aunt Marcia would have wished it. But you might, perhaps, give it a rather special character; make it something of a memorial meeting. What do you think of that?"

Miss Wax's face brightened.

"Excellent," she said. "Vesta, I do think that would be excellent. I am real glad I

came to you. I will have the room draped in mourning. Tapes has some nice black bombazine, a little injured by water, but — "

Vesta suppressed a shudder. "Oh, no, Miss Wax!" she said. "I wouldn't do that. Aunt Marcia did not like display of any kind, you know. Your pleasant parlors just as they are will be much better, I am sure."

"I do aim at showing my respect!" pleaded Miss Wax. "Perhaps we might all wear a crape rosette, or streamer. What do you think of that?"

But Vesta did not think well even of this, and Miss Wax reluctantly abandoned the plan of official mourning, though determined to show her respect in her own way as regarded her own person. She was a very tall woman, with a figure which, in youth, had been called willowy, and was now unkindly termed scraggy. She had been something

of a beauty, and there was a note of the pathetic in her ringlets and the few girlish trinkets she habitually wore, — a coral necklace, which at sixteen had set off admirably the whiteness of her neck, but which at fifty did not harmonize so well with the prevailing sallow tint; a blue enamel locket on a slender gold chain, etc. She was very fond of pink, and could never forget, poor lady, that Pindar Hollopeter had once called her a lily dressed in rose-leaves. But, though a trifle fantastic, Miss Bethia was as good a soul as ever wore prunella shoes, and her desire to do honor to Mrs. Tree's memory was genuine and earnest. Her soul yearned for the black bombazine hangings, but she was loyal to Vesta's expressed wish, and contented herself with removing certain rose-colored scarfs and sofa-pillows, which on ordinary occasions of entertainment were the delight of her eyes. She had gathered

all the white flowers she could find, and had arranged a kind of trophy of silver coffee-spoons on the mantelpiece, surrounding a black velvet band, on which was worked in silver tinsel the inscription:

"HER WE HONOR."

Miss Bethia had meant to have a photograph of Mrs. Tree in the centre of this sombre glory, but no photograph was to be had. Mrs. Tree had stoutly refused to be photographed, or to have her portrait painted in her later years.

"Folderol!" she used to say, when urged by loving friends or relatives. "When I go, I'm going, all there is of me. I shall leave my gowns, because they are good satin, but I'm not going to leave my old rags, nor the likeness of old rags. Cat's foot! don't talk to me!"

So, except the miniature which was Vesta

Strong's choicest treasure, the portrait of the brilliant, flashing little beauty whom Ethan Tree named the Pocket Venus when first he saw her, and whom he vowed then and there to woo and win, there was no portrait of Mrs. Tree; but Miss Wax put a cluster of immortelles above the inscription, and hoped it would "convey the idea."

In her own person, as has already been said, Miss Bethia felt that she could brook no dictation, even from Vesta. Accordingly, as the hour of the meeting approached, she arrayed herself in a trailing robe of black cashmere, with long bands of crape hanging from the shoulders. Examining with anxious care her slender stock of trinkets, she selected a mourning brooch of the size of a small saucer, which displayed under glass an urn and weeping willow in the choicest style of hair jewelry, and two hair bracelets, one a broad, massive band clasped with a

miniature, the other a chain of globules not unlike the rockweed bladders that children love to dry and "pop" between their fingers. Hair jewelry survived in Elmerton long after it was forgotten in other places. Miss Wax herself was a skilful worker in it, and might often be seen bending over the curious little round table, from the centre of which radiated numerous fine strands of hair, black, brown, or golden, hanging over the edge and weighted with leaden pellets. To see Miss Bethia's long fingers weaving the strands into braids or chains was a quaint and pleasant sight.

Her toilet completed, the good lady surveyed herself earnestly in the oval mirror, gave a gentle sigh, half approval, half regretful reminiscence, and went down to the parlor. Here she seated herself in her favorite chair and her favorite attitude. The chair was an ancient one, of slender and graceful

shape; and the attitude — somehow — was a good deal like the chair. Both were as accurate reproductions as might be of a picture that hung over Miss Bethia's head as she sat, the portrait of a handsome young woman with long, black ringlets, arched eyebrows, and dark, expressive eyes. Miss Bethia had been said to resemble this portrait of her great-great-aunt, and the resemblance was one which she was loth to relinquish. Accordingly, she loved to sit under it, in the same chair that the picture showed, leaning one elbow on the same little table, her cheek resting on the same fingers of the same hand, — the index and middle fingers, — while the others curved outward at a graceful angle. When seated thus, somebody was pretty sure to call attention to the resemblance, and not the most ill-natured gossip could grudge Miss Bethia the mild

pleasure that beamed in her eyes whenever it was noted.

There might be a slight resemblance, she would say modestly. It had been remarked upon, she might say, more than once. The lady was her relative, and likenesses ran strong in her family.

Tommy Candy had once irreverently named Miss Wax's parlor "the Wax Works," and the name had stuck, as naughty nicknames are apt to do. It was indeed quite a little museum in itself of the fruit of bygone accomplishments. Wax fruit, wax flowers — chiefly roses — in profusion, all carefully guarded by glass; pictures in worsted work, pictures in hair work, all in home-made frames of pinked leather, of varnished acorns, of painted velvet; vases and jars decorated with potichomanie, with decalcomanie, with spatter-work. One would think that not one, but seven, Misses Wax

had spent their entire lives in adorning this one room.

But the first guests to arrive on this occasion gave little heed either to the room or to the attitude of their hostess, even though, as usual, Miss Wax sat still for a moment, with an air of gentle appeal, before rising to receive them. Mrs. Deacon Weight is older than when we last met her, and her surname is even more appropriate than it was then; three hundred pounds of too, too solid flesh are encased in that brown alpaca dress, and her inspiration in trimming it with transverse bands of black velvet was not a happy one. Mrs. Weight was accompanied by Miss Eliza Goby, a lady whose high complexion and protruding eyes made her look rather more like a boiled lobster than anything else.

These two ladies, having obeyed the injunction of Miss Wax's handmaid to "lay

off their things" in the best bedroom, entered the parlor with an eager air.

Miss Wax, after her little pause, came forward to meet them.

"Good afternoon, Malvina," she said; "Eliza, I am pleased to see you, I am sure. Be seated, ladies, please." She waved her hand gracefully toward a couple of chairs, and resumed her attitude, though more from force of habit and a consciousness that others more appreciative were coming than from any sense of impressing these first comers.

Mrs. Weight seated herself with emphasis, and drew her chair near to that of her hostess, motioning her companion to do likewise.

"Bethia," she said, "we came early o' purpose, because we were wishful to see you alone for a minute before folks came. We want to know what stand you are prepared to take."

"That's it!" said Miss Goby, who had a short, snapping utterance, such as a lobster might have if it were endowed with powers of speech. "What stand you are prepared to take!"

"Stand?" repeated Miss Wax. "I do not quite comprehend you, ladies. I usually rise to receive each guest, and then resume my seat; it seems less formal and more friendly; and it fatigues me very much to stand long," added the poor lady, with a glance at the portrait.

"Land!" said Mrs. Weight. "That isn't what we mean, Bethia. We mean about this will of Mis' Tree's."

"Oh!" said Miss Wax. As she spoke, she sat upright, and the attitude was forgotten.

"We are wishful to know," said Mrs. Weight, "whether you think that the name of a place is to be changed back and forth

to suit the fancy of folks as weren't in their right minds, and are dead and buried besides. What I say is for this room only, ladies. I am not one to spread abroad, and I should be lawth indeed to speak ill of the dead, and them I've lived opposite neighbors to for thirty years, — whether neighborly in their actions or not, I will not say. But what I do say is, there's them in this village as has been browbeat and gormineered over for the hull of their earthly sojourn, and *they* don't propose to be browbeat and gormineered over from beyond the grave, in which direction forbid it as a Christian and the widder of a sainted man that I should say."

Before Miss Wax could reply, a murmur of voices was heard in the hall, and the next moment the Society entered in a body. There were women of all ages, from old Mrs. Snow, who now stood in the proud position of oldest inhabitant, down to Annie

Lizzie Weight, who was only seventeen. Miss Penny Pardon was there; Mrs. Pottle, the doctor's wife; and little Mrs. Bliss from the parsonage. There were perhaps thirty women in all, representing the best society of Elmerton.

Miss Wax received them with a troubled air, very different from her usual pensive calm. A red spot burned in the centre of each cheek, and her eyes were bright with suppressed excitement. Mrs. Pottle, observing her, decided that she was in for a fever, and cast her mind's eye over the doctor's engagements for the next few weeks. "She's liable to have a long run of it!" said Mrs. Pottle to herself. "I'm thankful that Doctor Strong went back yesterday, so the poor soul will have proper treatment."

This was not a social, but a working, meeting. Every woman came armed with thimble and work-bag, and a large basket being

produced, flannel and calico were dealt out by Miss Wax, and all set busily to work. But Miss Wax, instead of taking up her own needle, exchanged a few words with Mrs. Bliss. Mrs. Ware, a sweet-faced woman of fifty, invited by a look, joined them, and there was a low-voiced consultation; then Miss Wax rose and stood under the portrait and beside the mantelpiece with its trophy of black and silver.

"Ladies of the Society," she said; her thin treble voice trembled at first, and she fingered her bead reticule nervously, but she gathered strength as she went on. "Ladies of the Society, I asked our pastor's wife to address you, but Mrs. Bliss has a cold and feels unable so to do. I will therefore say a few words, though well aware how unfitted I am for such a task." She paused, and touched her lips delicately with a black-bordered handkerchief.

"This occasion, ladies, is a mournful one to most — I trust I may say to all — in this village. It is some years since — owing to advancing years — we have seen Her we honor at the meetings of this Society; but she was in former years a prop and a pillar of this Society, as she was of this village; and it is the desire of many, as expressed to me, that this meeting should be a memorial in honor of — of Her we honor, — Mrs. Ethan Tree."

She waved her hand toward the trophy with an air of introducing the ladies to it. For the life of her, little Mrs. Bliss could not help thinking of the Red Queen's introduction: "Pudding — Alice; Alice — Pudding!" Most of the ladies had a confused feeling that they ought to rise, and glanced at each other, half getting their work together, but Mrs. Bliss remained seated, and they followed her example. The

little minister's wife had loved Mrs. Tree devotedly, but she had a keen sense of the ludicrous; and, after the unseemly recollections referred to, she could not help recalling certain words spoken to her in a clear, incisive voice not so many weeks ago: "Ladies' Society, child? Bah! Parcel of fools! I get all of their society I want, sitting here in this chair."

"It would have been my wish," Miss Wax continued, "that the Society should have testified *as* a Society to the fact that this was a memorial meeting; it would have been my wish that each lady should wear a crape rosette, or the like of that, in token of mourning; but it was not agreeable to the family, and, if we wear them in our own hearts, ladies, it may do equally as well, if worn sincerely, which I am sure most, if not all, do."

She paused again to sigh and lift the

handkerchief, with her favorite delicate action of the third and fourth fingers.

"This small token," she continued, introducing the trophy anew, "is *but* a small one, and I could wish that gold instead of silver were procurable, for gold was the heart of Her we honor, and, though velvet does not precisely describe her manner, ladies, still well we know that out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh, and the heart being golden, the velvet is — a — I am sure — that is to say, velvet and gold are often associated as tokens of richness, and — and the nature of Her we honor was rich in goodness, and — "

Here poor Miss Wax became hopelessly involved, and taking refuge in a fit of coughing, looked imploringly at Mrs. Bliss. Thus silently adjured, the little lady rose, and in a few quiet words expressed the hearty sympathy of all present in Miss Wax's feel-

ing, and their gratitude to her for the graceful tribute she had preferred. A rising vote of thanks was then passed, and the Society settled to their labors.

For some time nothing was heard but requests for the shears and wonderings, who cut this gore? and the like; but the same thought was in all the ladies' minds, and as soon as was practicable the talk began again. Miss Eliza Goby nudged Miss Luella Slocum, a sharp-nosed lady with one eye that rolled like a marble and another that bored like a gimlet.

"You speak, Luella!" she said in a half-whisper. "Speak up and say what you said to me and Mrs. Weight this morning."

"I think Mrs. Weight ought to speak up herself," replied Miss Slocum, in the same tone. "She's older than me; it behooves her, a deacon's widow and all. I don't feel

any call to begin, Eliza; though I am ready to testify when it comes my turn."

Apparently Mrs. Weight was of the same opinion, for she now began the attack cautiously.

"The Society having expressed its views on this subject, Miss Wax and ladies, there is another on which I feel we have a call to speak together. As one of the oldest present, and the widder of a sainted man, I may have my own opinions, and they may be of consequence, or they may not; but howbeit, there is them present as has sojourned longer than me in this earthly pilgrimage, and I should wish to hear from Mrs. Philena Snow as to what are her sentiments in regards to changing the name of this village."

Mrs. Snow, an old lady of somewhat bewildered aspect, had learned in the course of eighty-odd years that a decided opinion was sometimes a dangerous thing. Replying

to Mrs. Weight's request, she said that she didn't know as it made any perticklar difference to her what the village was called; she hadn't very much longer to stay in it, she presumed likely. It used to be Quahaug, but some thought that wasn't a pretty sounding name, and she didn't know but Elmerton was prettier; and yet there was others thought — and so the old lady murmured herself away into silence. A confused hubbub of voices arose, but little Mrs. Bliss, saying to herself, 'Oh, for one hour of Dundee, — one minute of Mrs. Tree!" rose to the occasion.

"Ladies," she said, "though this village, Elmerton or Quahaug, whichever it is, has grown to seem like home, and a very dear home, to me, I still am comparatively speaking a newcomer. I should be very glad if some one lady would tell me in a few words how and why the change was originally

made. Mrs. Ware, perhaps you will be so good!"

Mrs. Ware's gentle face wore a disturbed look, but she responded promptly.

"The change was made many years ago, but I remember it distinctly. The old Indian name was Quahaug, and no one ever thought of any other name till Mr. Swain came to be pastor here. Mrs. Swain had a poetic turn, and she thought Quahaug an awkward-sounding name, and made considerable talk to that effect round the village. A petition to the Legislature was circulated, and many people signed it, and so the name was changed to Elmerton. Mrs. Tree was away at the time, on a voyage around the world, and when she came back she was much incensed, I remember, and expressed herself strongly. I always thought it a pity myself to change the old name."

"Phœbe Blyth was for the change," said

Miss Eliza Goby. "Phœbe and I were of one mind on the subject."

"It's the only time you ever were!" thought Miss Wax, but she did not speak the thought.

"Phœbe Blyth had some peculiar ideas," said Mrs. Weight, "but she showed her sense that time. Mis' Swain was a beautiful woman, and her ideas was beautiful simularly. Why, she wrote an elegant poem about it:

> "'Sure ne'er a village 'neath the sun
> More lovely is than Elmerton.'

Those were the first lines. I've got it copied out at home. I never thought Homer Hollopeter's poetry was a patch on Mis' Swain's."

"Homer was strong against the change," said Miss Wax. "Both Homer and Pindar, and two more intellectual men this village has never seen. I don't wish to say any-

thing against Mrs. Swain, but I for one never thought she had anything like Homer's gift. He was asked to write a poem on the subject, but he said his Muse scorned such a name as Elmerton."

"It's the first thing ever his Muse did scorn, I guess," retorted Miss Luella Slocum. "It's my belief Homer would write verses to a scarecrow if he had nothing else to write about."

"I didn't know he ever wrote any to you, Luella," said Miss Penny Pardon, her usually gentle spirit roused to anger by this attack on one whom she considered a great though unappreciated poet.

"Ladies! ladies!" said little Mrs. Bliss, "pray let us keep to the point. We are not here to discuss Mr. Hollopeter's poetry. Perhaps we would better change the subject altogether, and confine our conversation to subjects connected with our work."

"Excuse *me,* Mrs. Bliss!" said Mrs. Weight. "Though well aware that since the death of the sainted man whose name I bear, I am of no account in this village, still I *have* my feelings and I *am* a human being, — deny it who can, — and, while I have breath to speak, — which by reason of spasms growing on me may not be long, — I will protest against changing the name of this village back to heathen and publican names, from which it was rescued by them as now fills mansions in the sky. I would not wish to be understood as reflecting on anybody, and I name no names; but them as has lived on flowery beds of ease, no matter how long, cannot expect to gormineer over this village to all eternity; and so I proclaim, — hear me who will."

Mrs. Weight had risen to her feet, and stood heaving and panting, a mountain of protest. Mrs. Bliss would have interfered,

to pour oil on the troubled meeting, but before she could speak the tall form of Miss Bethia Wax had risen, and stood rigid, pointing to the trophy.

"Ladies of the Society," she said, "and our honored pastor's wife: I cannot sit still and listen to words which are aimed at Her we honor. This is a memorial meeting, sanctioned as such by the family of Her we honor. She died as she lived, with this village on her mind and in her heart, and she has given of her basket and her store, her treasures of earth and treasures of sea, and gems of purest ray serene; she has given all, save such as needed by the family, to this village, to have and to hold till death do them part; and what I say is, shame upon us if we cannot obey the wishes of Her we honor, our benefactress, who wafts us from the other shore her parting benediction!"

But neither Mrs. Bliss nor Miss Wax

could longer stem the tide of speech. It ran, swelled, overflowed, a torrent of talk.

"Never in my born days!"

"I'd like to know who had the right if she hadn't!"

"I s'pose we've got some rights of our own, if we ain't rich in this world's goods."

"I should laugh if we were to change back at this time of day."

"I should like to remind you, Mrs. Weight, that —

> "'While the lamp holds out to burn,
> The vilest sinner may return!'"

"Mrs. Bliss and ladies: I have not lived in this village seventy years to be called the vilest sinner in it. I appeal to this society if names is to be called at a meeting where the members are supposed to be Christians —"

But Mrs. Bliss, though little, could, like

Hermia, be fierce, and it was in a very peremptory tone that she exclaimed:

"The discussion on this subject is closed. Sister Slocum, will you give out the hymn?" and Miss Luella Slocum, one eye gleaming hatred and the other malice, announced that the Society would now join in singing "Blest be the tie that binds!"

CHAPTER IV.

MOSTLY GOSSIP

"My dear Doctor Strong: — The deed is done! The selectmen met last night, and voted to memorialize the Legislature in regard to changing the name of the village; and, as the rest is a mere matter of business routine, I think we may regard the thing as settled. So, as dear Mrs. Tree said, 'Hooray for Quahaug!' The vote was not unanimous; that was hardly to be expected. John Peavey was opposed to the change, so was George Goby; but the general sentiment was strong in favor of carrying out Mrs. Tree's wishes. That, of course, is the real issue, and it is beautiful to see the spirit

of affection and loyalty that animates the majority of our people. Surely, our beloved old friend has built herself a monument *ære perennio* in the hearts of her neighbors.

"I write this hasty line, feeling sure that you and Mrs. Strong will be anxious to hear the outcome of the meeting.

"With kindest regards to both, and affectionate greeting to the little flock, believe me always Faithfully yours,

"JOHN BLISS."

The little minister sealed and addressed his note, then took his hat and stick and started for the post-office.

"You won't forget my pink worsted, John!" and Mrs. Bliss popped her pretty head out of the window.

"Certainly not, my dear! certainly not!" said Mr. Bliss, with an air of collecting his

"'GOOD MORNING, SETH!' SAID THE LITTLE MINISTER"

wits hurriedly. "Pink worsted; to be sure! At Miss Pardon's, I presume?"

"Of course! Saxony; you have the sample in your pocket, pinned into an envelope. Two skeins, John dear. Now do you think you can get that right? It is a shame to make you do such things, but I cannot leave Baby, and he really needs the jacket."

"Of course, Marietta; of course, my dear! You know I am only too glad to help in little ways; I wish I could do more!"

"It is so little a man can do!" he reflected, as he paced along the village street; "and Marietta's care is incessant. Motherhood is a blessed but a most laborious state."

Arrived at the post-office, he found Seth Weaver perched on a ladder, inspecting the weather-beaten sign-board, which bore the legend, "Elmerton Post-office."

"Good morning, Seth!" said the little minister.

"Same to you, Elder!" replied Seth, taking his pipe from his mouth. "Nice day! I was lookin' to see whether we'd need us a new sign, but I guess this board'll do, come to scrape and plane it. It's a good pine board; stood a lot o' weather, this board has. My father painted this."

"Did he so, Seth?" said Mr. Bliss. "I was not aware that your father was a painter."

"Painter, carpenter, odd-job man, same's me! He learned me all his trades, and too many of 'em. It would be money in my pocket to-day if I didn't know the half of 'em."

Seth sat down on the top round of the ladder — it was a short one — and took out his knife and a bit of soft wood. The minister sighed, thinking of his sermon at home half-written, but accepted the unspoken invitation.

"How is that, Seth?" he asked, cheerfully.

Seth settled himself comfortably — it is not every man who can sit comfortably on a ladder — and, squaring his shoulders, began to whittle complacently.

"Wal, Elder, it stands to reason," he said. "A man can be one thing, or he can be two things; but when he starts out to be the hull string of fish, he ends by not bein' nary one of 'em. It takes all of a thing to make the hull of it; yes, sir. I don't mean that Father was that way; Father was a smart man; and I've tried to make a shift to keep up with the tail of the procession myself; but I tell ye there's ben times when I've wished I didn't know how to handle a livin' thing except my paint-brush. Come spring, I tell ye I lose weight, projeckin' round this village. One wants his blinds painted right off day before yesterday, and another'll get

his everlastin' if his roof isn't mended before sundown. It's 'Oh, Seth, when be you comin' to hang that bell-wire?' and 'Seth, where was you yesterday when you wasn't mendin' that gate-post?' and — I dono! sometimes I get so worked up I think I'll do the way Father did. Father never bothered with 'em. He just laid out his week to suit himself. Two days he'd paint, and two days he'd odd-job, and two days he'd fish. Further and moreover, whatever he was doin', he'd do it his own way. Paintin' days, he'd use the paint he had till he used it up. Didn't make no difference what folks said to him; he was just that deef he only heard what he wanted to, and he didn't care. Gorry! I can see him now, layin' on the blue paint on old Mis' Snow's door, and she screechin' at him, 'Green! green, I tell ye! I want it green!' Old Father, he never took no notice, and that door stayed blue till

it wore off. Yes, sir! that was the way to handle 'em; but I can't seem to fetch it. Guess I was whittled out of a softer stick, kind o' popple stuff, without no spunk to it. A woman tells me she must have a new spout to her pump or she'll die, and I'm that kind of fool I think she will, and leave all else to whittle out that pump-spout. Wal, it takes all kinds. That was quite a meetin' last night, Elder."

"It was indeed," Mr. Bliss assented. "A notable meeting, Seth. As I have just been writing to Doctor Strong, it was a great pleasure to find the feeling so nearly unanimous in regard to carrying out the wishes of our revered friend."

Seth grinned.

"Yes!" he said. "Me and Salem saw to that."

"Saw to it?" repeated Mr. Bliss.

"We went round and sized folks up, kind

of; you know the way, Elder; same as you do come parish-meetin' time. No offence! There don't everybody know which way they're goin' to jump till you tell 'em. Most of 'em was all right enough, and saw reason good, same as we did, for doin' as Mis' Tree wished done; but there's some poor sticks in every wood-pile; John Peavey's one of 'em. Gorry! I guess likely he'll be some further down the ro'd before he gets *his* shack painted, unless he doos it himself. That'll be somethin' tangible for him, as Old Man Butters said."

He paused, and a twinkle came into his eyes; but the minister did not twinkle back.

"You've heerd of Uncle Ithe's last prayer-meetin'?" said Seth. "No? now ain't that a sight!"

He came down a round or two, and settled himself afresh, the twinkle deepening. "Uncle Ithe — Old Man Butters, Buffy

Landin' Ro'd — you remember him, Elder?"

"Surely! surely! I remember Mr. Butters well, but I cannot recall his having attended a prayer-meeting during my incumbency in Elm— I would say Quahaug."

Seth chuckled. "No more you would," he said. "No more he did. 'Twas before you come, in Mr. Peake's time. Elder Peake, he was a good man; I've nothin' to say against him; he meant well, every time. But he was one of those kind o' men, he had his two-foot rule in his pants pocket, and, if you squared with that, you was all right, and, if you didn't, you was all wrong. Now some folks is like a two-foot rule, and some is like a kedge-anchor, and the Lord made 'em both, I expect; but Elder Peake, he couldn't see it that way, and he took it into his head that Uncle Ithe warn't doin' as he should. Old Uncle Ithe — I dono!

he had a kind o' large way with him, as you might say; swore some, and made too free with Scripture, some thought; did pretty much as he was a mind to, but cal'lated to live square, and so did — 'cordin' to his idees, and mine. You might say Uncle Ithe was like — wal, like this hammer. He couldn't rule a straight line, mebbe, but he'd hit the nail every time. Wal, Elder Peake met up with him one day, and spoke to him about his way of life. 'I'd like to see things a trifle different with you, Mr. Butters,' he says; 'man of your age and standin',' he says, 'ought to be an example,' he says. You know the way they talk — excuse *me,* Elder. Some of 'em, I would say. Nothin' personal, you understand."

"I understand, Seth; pray go on."

"'What do ye mean?' says Uncle Ithe. 'What have I been a-doin' of, Elder?'

"'Oh, nothin' tangible,' says Mr. Peake,

'nothin' tangible, Mr. Butters. I hear things now and again that don't seem just what they should be in regards to your spiritual condition, — man of your age and standin', you understand, — but nothin' tangible, nothin' tangible!' And he waved himself off, a way he had, as if he was tryin' to fly before his time.

"Old Uncle Ithe, he never said a word, only grunted, and worked his eyebrows up and down, the way *he* had; but come next prayer-meetin', there he was, settin' up in his pew, stiff as a bobstay, with his eye on the elder. Elder Peake was tickled to death to think he'd got the old man out, and when he'd had his own say, he sings out: 'Brother Butters, we should be pleased to hear a few remarks from you.'

"Old Uncle Ithe, he riz up kind o' slow, a j'int at a time, till he stood his full hei'th. Gorry! I can see him now; he seemed to fill

the place. He looks square at Elder Peake, and he says: 'Darn your old prayer-meetin'!' he says. 'There's somethin' tangible for ye!' he says; and off he stumped out the room, and never sot foot in it ag'in. I tell ye, he was a case, old Uncle Ithe."

"I think he was, Seth!" said Mr. Bliss, laughing. "I am rather glad, do you know, that I only knew him later, when age had — in a degree — mellowed his disposition."

At this moment Will Jaquith put his head out of the post-office window.

"Good morning, Mr. Bliss!" he said. "There's another story about Old Man Butters that Seth must tell you, if you have not already heard it, — about the trouble with his second wife."

Seth twinkled more than ever. "Sho!" he said. "That's last year's p'tetters. I make no doubt Elder Bliss has heard that a dozen times."

"Not once, I assure you, Seth," said Mr. Bliss. "I shall be glad to hear it, and then I really must —" he checked himself. Was not this an opportunity, come to him unsought? Seth Weaver was not as regular at church as could be wished.

"Pray let me hear the anecdote!" he said, heartily. "And yet," he added to himself, "I caution my people against listening to gossip, — life is a tangled skein."

"That was before I was born or thought of," said Seth. "Uncle Ithe's second wife was Drusilly Sharp (his fust was a Purrington), and she was a Tartar. Gra'm'ther Weaver told me this; she was own sister to Uncle Ithe. Gra'm'ther used to say there warn't another man under the canopy could have lived with Drusilly Sharp only her brother Ithuriel. As I was sayin' a spell back, he had a kind o' large way of lookin' at things. Gra'm'ther says to him once:

'I don't see how you stand it, Ithuriel,' she says. 'I don't stand it,' says Uncle Ithe. 'I git out from under foot, and wait till the clouds roll by,' he says. 'Spells she gets out of breath, and them's the times I come into the kitchen. There's where a farmer has the pull,' he says. 'Take a city man, and when he's in the house he's in it, and obleeged to stay there. But take a farmer, and, if it's hot in the kitchen, he's got the wood-shed, and, when you're choppin', you can't hear what she's sayin',' he says. 'Somebody's got to put up with Drusilly,' he says, 'and I'm used to it, same as I am red pepper on my hash.'

"Wal, one day Uncle Ithe come home, and she warn't there. He found a note on the dresser, sayin' she warn't comin' back, she couldn't stand it no longer. Land knows what *she* had to stand! She had baked bread and pies, she said (she was a master good

cook), and the beans was in the oven, and that was all there was to it, from his truly Drusilly Butters.

"Wal, Uncle Ithe studied over it a spell, and then he sot down and *he* wrote a note, and this was the way it read:

"'Whereas my wife Drusilly has left my bed and board while I was down to Tupham diggin' clams, and whereas I never give her reason good for so doin', resolved that all persons is warned to pay no bills of her contractin' from now on; but the cars will run just the same.'

"Signed his name out in full, and sent it to the paper. I got it now to home, in Gra'm'ther's scrap-book. Yes, sir, that was Uncle Ithe all over."

"And what was the outcome of it, Seth?" asked Mr. Bliss.

"Oh, she come back! He knew she would. She stayed with her folks a spell, and they

reasoned with her; and then she saw the notice in the paper, and that made her so mad she run all the way home. Uncle Ithe was settin' in the kitchen smokin' his pipe, at peace with all mankind, when she run in, all out of breath, and mad as hops. 'You take that notice out the paper, Ithuriel Butters!' she hollers. 'You're the meanest actin' man ever I see in my life, and the ugliest, and so I've come to tell you.' And then she couldn't say another word, she'd run that fast and was that mad.

"Uncle Ithe took his pipe out of his mouth, and turned round and give her a look, and then put it back.

"'How do, Drusilly?' he says. 'I was lookin' for you,' he says. 'I'm on the last pie now.' And that was every word he said about it, or she, either."

CHAPTER V.

IN MISS PENNY'S SHOP

The Reverend John Bliss walked homeward, revolving many things. Seth's stories, the vexed question of prayer-meetings, the Second Epistle to the Hebrews, from which his text was taken, Mrs. Tree's will, and the New England character (Mr. Bliss was a Minnesota man) made an intricate network of thought which so absorbed his mind that his feet carried him whithersoever they would.

"A tangled skein!" he said aloud, shaking his head; "a tangled skein!" and then he stopped abruptly, looked about him, and began to retrace his steps hurriedly. He had forgotten the pink worsted.

The little minister entered Miss Penny Pardon's shop with an air of nervous apology, and an inward shiver. He hated women's shops; he was always afraid of seeing crinoline, or hair-curlers, or some other reprehensibly feminine article.

"Why will they?" he murmured to himself, as even now his unwilling eye lighted on a "Fluffy Fedora." "Why will — oh, good morning, Miss Pardon; a beautiful morning after the rain."

"Good mornin', Mr. Bliss!" said Miss Penny, with a beaming smile. "You're quite a stranger, ain't you? Yes, sir, 'tis elegant weather; and the rain, too, so seasonable yesterday. I think weather most always *is* seasonable right along; far as I've noticed, that is. Pleasant to see spring comin', isn't it, Mr. Bliss? Not but what I've enjoyed the winter, too, real well. I think the snow's real pretty, specially *in*

winter. That's right; yes, sir, we should be thankful for all. Was there anything I could do for you to-day, Mr. Bliss?"

"Yes! yes, Miss Pardon," said Mr. Bliss, nervously. "I — that is — Mrs. Bliss desired some pink — pink — worsted, I think it was. Yes, I am quite positive it was pink worsted. Have you the article?"

He looked relieved, and met Miss Penny's eye almost hardily.

"Worsted, sir? Yes, indeed, we keep it. What kind did she wish, Mr. Bliss? Single zephyr, do you think it was, or Germantown?"

Miss Penny's tone was warmly sympathetic; she always felt for gentlemen who came on such errands.

"They feel like a fish on a sidewalk," she would say; "real homesick!"

Mr. Bliss pondered. "I — I think it *was* a German town," he said, slowly. "I am

almost positive it was a German town, — or province; the exact name escapes me. Hanover, perhaps? Nassau? Saxe-Coburg? I incline to think it was Saxe-Coburg, Miss Pardon. Have you the article?"

It was Miss Penny's turn to look puzzled. "We don't keep that, sir," she said. "I don't know as I ever heard of it. All we keep is Germantown and Saxony, and —"

"That is it!" cried the little minister. "Saxony! to be sure! Saxony, of course. And — yes, I have a sample — somewhere!"

He felt in his pockets, and produced a parish circular, a calendar, a note-book, a fishing-line, and finally the envelope containing the sample.

Miss Penny beamed at sight of it. "Yes, sir, we have it," she announced, joyfully.

"Mis' Bliss got it here only last week. How much did she say, Mr. Bliss?"

"Two pounds," said Mr. Bliss, promptly and decidedly.

"Two —" Miss Penny looked aghast. "Why, we don't generally — I doubt if we have that much in the store, Mr. Bliss. Was she goin' to make a slumber robe?"

"It was — I think — for an infant's jacket," Mr. Bliss hazarded, looking sidelong at the door. These things were hard to bear; harder than Marietta knew; yet how gladly should he do it for her, on that very account. He turned an appealing glance on Miss Penny. "An infant's jacket would not, you think, require two pounds?" he asked.

"A jacket for your little Beauty Darlin', to be sure! She bought a pattern, too, I remember, a shell border, and then — don't you believe p'r'aps it was skeins she said,

Mr. Bliss, instead of pounds? I presume most likely it was." Her voice was tender now, as if addressing a little child.

"You are probably right, Miss Penelope," said the minister, dejectedly. "I seem to have singularly little faculty for these matters. Two skeins — ah, yes! I perceive it is so written here on the envelope. I beg your pardon, Miss Penelope!"

"You've no need to, Mr. Bliss, not a mite!" cried Miss Penny. "We all make mistakes, and, if you never done anything worse than this, you'd be sure of the Kingdom. Not but what you are anyways, I expect. Gentlemen don't have any call to know about fancy work as a rule, especially a pastor, whose mind on higher things is set; you remember the hymn. There is those, though, that finds comfort in it, same as a woman doos. I knew a gentleman once who used to come and get his worsted of me just

as regular! *He* crocheted for his nerves; helped him to sleep, so he thought, and it *is* real soothin', but he's dead and buried now. I often think, times when I hear of a man bein' nervous and crotchety about the house, there! I think, if he'd only set down and crochet a spell, or knit, one of the two, what a comfort it would be to him and his folks. We're made as we are, though; that's right. Was there anything more, Mr. Bliss? Twenty cents; thank *you,* sir. Real pleased you came in; call again, won't you? *Good* morning!"

Miss Penny looked anxiously after the minister as he walked away. "I do hope he'll get that home safe!" she said. "I set out to ask him if he didn't think he'd better put it in his pocket, but I was afraid he might think me forth-puttin'. Like as not he'll forget every single thing about it, and drop it right in the street. There! I

don't see *why* men-folks is so forgetful, do you, Sister? Not that they are all alike, of course."

"Some ways they are," said Miss Prudence.

Miss Prudence was invisible, but the door between the shop and her sanctum was always ajar, for she liked to hear what was going on.

"I never see the man yet that I'd trust to carry a parcel home; not a small parcel, that is. If it's a whole dress, he'll take it all right, if he takes it at all; but give him a small parcel that wants to be carried careful, and he'll drop it, or else scrunch it up in his pocket and forget it. I've got to run up these brea'ths now; Miss Wax is comin' at eleven to try on."

There was a silence, broken only by the cheerful whir of the sewing-machine, and the still more cheerful voice of Miss Penny

cooing to her birds. She hopped from one cage to another, feeding, stroking, caressing.

"You're lookin' dumpy to-day, darlin'," she said, addressing a rather battered-looking mino bird. "There! the fact is, you ain't so young as once you was. You're like the rest of us, only you don't know it, and we do — some of us! Here's a nice bit of egg for you, Beauty; that'll shine you up some, though I do expect you've seen your best days. Luella Slocum told me she expected me to make this bird over as good as new, Sister. I told her I guessed what ailed him was the same as did the rest of us. Stop the clock tickin', I told her, and she'd stop his trouble and hers as well. She was none too well pleased. She'd just got her a new front from Miss Wax, and not a scrap of gray in it. She'd ought to sing 'Backward, turn backward,' if anybody

ought. There!" The exclamation had a note of dismay in it.

"What's the matter?" asked Miss Prudence; the machine had stopped, and her mouth was apparently full of pins.

"Why, I never thought to ask Mr. Bliss how Mr. Homer was, and he just the one to tell us. Now did you ever! Fact is, when he come in, I hadn't got my face straight after that woman askin' for mesmerized petticoats. I was shakin' still when I see Mr. Bliss comin', and my wits flew every which way like a scairt hen. But speakin' of petticoats reminds me, Tommy Candy was in this mornin' while you was to market, and *he* said Mr. Homer was re'l slim. 'Pestered with petticoats' was what he said, and I said, 'What do you mean, Tommy Candy?' and he said, 'Just what I say, Miss Penny,' he said. 'I guess you and Miss Prudence are the only single or

widder women in Quahaug that ain't settin' their caps for Mr. Homer,' he said. And I said, 'Tommy Candy, that's no way for you to talk, if you *have* had money left you!' I said. He said he knew it wasn't, but yet he couldn't help it, and you and I had always ben good to him sence his mother died. He has a good heart, Tommy has, only he doos speak up so queer, and love mischief. But he says it's a fact, they do pester Mr. Homer, Sister. There! it made me feel fairly ashamed. 'Don't tell me Miss Bethia Wax is one of 'em,' I said, 'because I shouldn't believe you if you did,' I said. 'Well, I won't,' he said, 'for she ain't; she's a lady.' But some, he said, was awful, and he means to stand between; he don't intend Mr. Homer should marry anybody except he wants to, and it's the right one. Seemed to have re'l good *i*deas, and he thinks the world of Mr. Homer. I like

Tommy; he has a re'l pleasant way with him."

"You'd make cream cheese out of 'most any skim-milk, Sister," said Miss Prudence, kindly. "Not but what Tommy has improved a vast deal to what he was. It's his lameness, I expect."

"That's right!" cried little Miss Penny, the tears starting to her round brown eyes. "That's it, Sister, and that's what turns my heart to the boy, I expect. So young, and to be lame for life; it is pitiful."

"He did what he had a mind to do," said Miss Prudence, grimly. "He had no call to climb that steeple, as I know of."

"Oh, Sister, there's so many that has no call to do *as* they do, and yet many times they don't seem to get their come-uppance, far as we can see; I expect they do, though, come to take it in the yard *or* the piece. But, howsoever, Mis' Tree has done hand-

some by Tommy, and he has a grateful heart, and means to do his part by Mr. Homer and the *Museum*, I feel sure of that. Sister, do you suppose Pindar Hollopeter is alive? Seem's though if he was, he'd come home now, at least for a spell: Homer in affliction, as you may say, and left with means and all. How long is it since he went away?"

"Thirty years," said Miss Prudence. "I always thought it was a good riddance to bad rubbidge when Pindar went away."

"Why, Sister, he was an elegant man, flighty, but re'l elegant; at least, so he appeared to me; I was a child then. Why did he go, Sister? I never rightly understood about it."

"He went from flightiness," said Miss Prudence. "Him and Homer was both crazy about Mary Ashton, and Pindar asked her to have him. She'd as soon have had the

meetin'-house weathercock, and when she told him so, — I don't mean them words; Mary would have spoke pleasant to the Father of Evil."

"Why, Sister!"

"Well, she would. Anyhow, when she said no, he made sure she was going to have Homer, and off he went, and never come back. So that's *his* story."

"I want to know!" said Miss Penny. "But she never — "

"She never cast a look at ary one of 'em. She give her heart to George Jaquith to break, and he done it; and now he's dead, and so is she. But Homer is alive, and so is Pindar, for all I know. He never liked here as Homer did; he always wanted to get away, from a boy. Old Mis' Hollopeter run a great resk, I always thought, the way she brought up those two boys, fillin' their heads with poetry and truck. If she had

learned 'em a good trade, now, it would be bread in their mouths this day; not that Homer is ever likely to want now. I wish't he'd marry Bethia Wax."

"I don't know, Sister Prudence," said Miss Penny, who was romantic. "Some is cut out for a single life, and I think's it's real pretty to see a man faithful to the ch'ice of his youth."

"Ch'ice of his grandmother!" retorted Miss Prudence, sharply. "Don't talk foolishness, Penny! A woman can get along single, and oftentimes do better, and it's meant some of 'em should, or there wouldn't be so many extry; but leave a man alone all his life, and either he dries up or else he sploshes out, and either way he don't amount to what he should. They ain't got enough *to* 'em, someways. There! this is ready to try on, and Miss Wax ain't here. She said she'd be here by eleven."

"I see her comin' now," cried Miss Penny. "It's just on the stroke; she's 'most always punctual. She has a re'l graceful, pretty walk. *I* think Miss Wax is a fine-lookin' woman, though a little mite more flesh would set good on her."

"Her clo'es would set better on her if she had it," said Miss Prudence. "I know that. I don't know but I'd sooner fit a bolster than a bean-pole."

"Hush, Sister, for pity's sake! Good mornin', Miss Wax. You're right on the dot, ain't you? I was just sayin' to Sister how punctual you always was. Yes'm, we're smart; the same old story, peace and poverty. You can go right in, Miss Wax; Sister's expectin' you."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SORROWS OF MR. HOMER

"Morning, Direxia," said Will Jaquith. "How is Mr. Homer this morning? Better, I hope, than he was feeling yesterday."

Direxia Hawkes laid down her duster, and turned a troubled face to the visitor. "There!" she said, "I'm glad you've come, Willy. I can't do nothin' with that man. He ain't eat a thing this day, only just a mossel of toast and a sosser of hominy. It's foolishness, I will say. Mis' Tree may have had her ways, — I expect we all do, if all was known, — but I will say she eat her victuals and relished 'em. I don't see why or wherfore I was left if there ain't any-

body ever going to eat anythin' in this house again; there! I don't."

"Oh, Dexy, don't be foolish!" said Will. "I'm coming out this minute to get a doughnut. You will have to live till my wife learns to make as good ones as yours, and that will be some time. Just wait till I see Mr. Homer a minute, and then I'll come out and make love to you, you dear old thing."

Direxia brightened. "Don't she make 'em good?" she asked. "Well, she's young yet. I dono as I had just the hang of 'em when I was her age. Doughnuts is a thing you've got to have the hang of, I've always said."

She retired, beaming, to heap goodies on fine china dishes for her darling, and Jaquith turned his steps toward "the Captain's room." This was a small room looking out over the harbor, and had been Captain Tree's special sanctum. It was

fitted like a ship's cabin, with lockers and swinging shelves, all in teak-wood and brass. On the walls were ranged telescopes, spy-glasses, and speaking-trumpets of all sizes and varieties, and over the desk hung a picture of the good ship *Marcia D.* of Quahaug, Ethan Tree, master. This picture was a triumph of Japanese embroidery, having been done in colored silks while the ship lay in the harbor of Nagasaki, and, next to his wife's miniature, it was the Captain's most precious possession. The year after it was made, the *Marcia D.* had gone down in a typhoon in the South Seas: all hands were saved, to be tossed about for three days on a life-raft, and then tossed ashore on a wild island. The bright shells which framed the picture had been picked up by his wife on the shore, where she watched all day for a coming sail, while master and mariners caught fish and turtles, and gathered

strange fruits for her, their lady and their queen. Ethan Tree used to say that that week on the island was one of the best in his life, even though he had lost his ship.

"True blue!" he would murmur, looking up at the picture. "She showed her colors that time. She never flinched, little Marcia. Her baby coming, and not a woman or a doctor within a thousand miles; but she never flinched. Only her cheeks flew the flag and her eyes signalled, when I sung out, 'Sail ho!' True blue, little wife!"

Now, instead of the stalwart figure of Captain Tree, the slender form of Mr. Homer Hollopeter occupied, but did not fill, the chair beneath the picture. The little gentleman sat huddled disconsolately over some papers, and it was a melancholy face that he lifted in response to Will Jaquith's cheery "How are you, Mr. Homer? pretty well this morning?"

Mr. Homer sighed. "I thank you, William, I thank you!" he said. "My corporal envelope is, I am obliged to you, robust; — a — vigorous; — a — exempt for the moment from the ills that flesh is heir to — Shakespeare; we perceive that even our greatest did not disdain upon occasion to conclude a phrase with a preposition, though the practice is one generally reprehended; — a — condemned; — a — denied the sanction of the critics of our own day. I trust you find yourself in health and spirits, William?"

"Capital!" said Will. "Lily and I and the boy, all as well as can be. I have brought the mail, Mr. Homer. I thought you might not feel like coming down this morning, as you were not well yesterday."

As he spoke, he laid the mail-bag on the table, and, seating himself, proceeded to unlock it. Mr. Homer's eyes brightened in

spite of himself; his face grew animated. "That was kind of you, William!" he said. "That was — a — considerate; that was — a — benevolent. I am greatly obliged to you; greatly obliged to you."

He opened the bag with trembling fingers, and began to sort the letters it contained.

"The occupation of twenty years," he continued, plaintively, "is not to be relinquished lightly. If I did not feel that I was leaving it in worthy hands, I — ah! here is a letter for Susan Jennings, from her son. There is an enclosure, William. Probably Jacob is doing better, and is sending his mother a little money. She is a worthy woman, a worthy woman; I rejoice for Susan. A dutiful son, sir, is an oasis in the desert; a — fountain in a sandy place; a — a number of gratifying things which I cannot at this moment name. You were a dutiful son, William. That must be an

unspeakable satisfaction to you, now that your sainted mother has — a — departed; has — a — gone from us; has — a — ascended on wings of light to the empyrean. You were a dutiful son, sir."

William Jaquith colored high. "Not always, Mr. Homer," he said. "In thinking of these late happy years, you must not forget the others that went before. I should be dead, or a castaway, this day, but for Mrs. Tree."

"I rejoice at it, my dear sir!" cried Mr. Homer, his gentle eyes kindling. "That is to say — I would not wish to be understood as — but I am sure you apprehend me, William. I would say that my respect, my — a — reverence, my — a — affection and admiration for my cousin Marcia, sir, are enhanced a hundredfold by the knowledge of what she did for you. It cheers me, sir; it — a — invigorates me; it — a

— causes a bud of spring to blow in a bosom which — a — was sealed, as I may say, with ice of — a — in short, with ice: — a — what is that pink envelope, William?"

"For Joe Breck, sir; from S. E. Willow, South Verona. That is Sophy, I suppose?"

Mr. Homer quivered with pleasure as he took the long, slim note in his hand. "This is from Sophia!" he said. "Sophia Willow is a sweet creature, William; — a — dewy flower, as the lamented Keats has it; a — milk-white lamb that bleats for man's protection, as he also observes. And Joseph Breck, sir, is a worthy youth. He has 'sighed and looked and sighed again' (Dryden, sir! a great poet, though unduly influenced by the age in which he lived) these two years past, I have had reason to think. Of late his letters to Sophia have been more frequent; there was one only yesterday, if you remember, a bulky one, probably con-

taining — a — remarks of a tender nature; — a — outpourings of an ardent description. This is the response. Its rosy hue leads me to hope that it is a favorable one, William. The shape, too: a square envelope has always something of self-assertion about it; but this long, slender, graceful note has in its very appearance something — a — yielding; something — a — acquiescent; something — a — indicative of the budding of the tender passion. I augur happily from the aspect of this note. A — I trust your sentiments accord with mine, William?"

"Yes, indeed, sir," said Will, heartily. "I am sure Sophy would not have the heart to say 'no' on such pretty paper as this; not that I think she ever meant to. But here is a letter for you, Mr. Homer, and this is a long envelope, too, only it is green instead of pink. Postmark Bexley."

Mr. Homer started. "Not Bexley, Will-

iam!" he said, nervously. "I trust you are mistaken; look again, if you will be so good. I cannot conceive why I should receive a letter from Bexley."

"I'm sorry, sir," replied Will, "but Bexley it is. Would you like me to open it, Mr. Homer?"

Mr. Homer cast a glance of aversion at the green envelope; it certainly was somewhat vivid in tint, and was rather liberally than delicately scented.

"I should be glad if you would do so, William," he said. "I seem to feel — a — less vigorous than when you first came in. I should be obliged if you would look it over, William."

With a glance wherein compassion struggled with amusement, Jaquith opened the letter and glanced through it.

"From Mrs. Pryor," he said, briefly.

Mr. Homer moved uneasily in his seat.

"I — a — apprehended as much," he said. "Go on, William."

With another compassionate twinkle, Will complied, and read as follows:

"'My dearest Homer:'"

Mr. Homer winced, and wiped his forehead nervously.

"'Ever since that dreadful day which I *will not name,* I have been *prostrated* with grief and mortification; grief on my own account; mortification — I blush to say it — for the sake of one whose present condition *seals my lips.* Need I say that I allude to Aunt Marcia? For some time I felt that all relations between me and Elmerton must be *closed forever.*'"

Mr. Homer looked up.

"'But in the end a more Christian spirit prevailed.'"

Mr. Homer looked down again.

"'I have conquered my pride; you can imagine what a struggle it was, for you know what the Darracott pride *is,* though the Hollopeters only intermarried with us in your grandfather's time. I came out of the struggle a *physical wreck.*'"

Mr. Homer looked up once more.

"'But with me, as all who know me are aware, *flesh* is *nothing, spirit* is *all!* I have resolved to let bygones be bygones, Homer; to put all this sad and shocking business behind me, and strive to forget that it ever existed. In this spirit, my dear cousin, I write to offer you the *affection* of a *sister.*'"

Mr. Homer uttered a hollow groan, and dropped his head in his hands.

"'We are both alone, Homer. My girls are married; and, though the greater portion of my heart is *in the grave* with Mr. Pryor, enough of it yet breathes to keep

a *warm corner* for you, my nearest *living relative*. The extraordinary and iniquitous document, which I will not further describe, has laid a heavy burden on your shoulders; and I feel it a *duty* to give you all the aid in my power in the work of arranging and classifying the collection of worldly trifles by which our late unhappy relative set such store. *I,* Homer, have *outgrown* such matters. It is for Aunt Marcia's own sake that I feel, as you must, the necessity of something like an equitable arrangement in regard to all this trumpery. My *duty to my children* obliges me, much against my will, to protest against Vesta Strong's having all the lace and jewelry. If she had any sense of decency, she would not accept what was clearly the raving of *senile dementia*. As to the grasping and mercenary spirit shown by her and her husband, I say nothing: let their consciences deal with

them, if they *own such an article; I* am *above* it.

"'Let me know, dearest Homer, when you are ready for me, and I will come to you on the instant. I will bring an excellent maid-servant to replace the old creature, whom I trust you have dismissed ere this. If not, let me urge you strongly to get rid of her at once. She is not a fit person to have charge of you. I feel that the *sooner* I come to you the *better;* let us lose no time, so pray write at once, dear Homer, to

"'Your loving cousin,

"'MARIA DARRACOTT PRYOR.'"

Will's eyes were twinkling as he folded up the letter, but they were very tender as he turned them on Mr. Homer, sitting crumpled like a withered leaf in his chair.

"Cheer up, Mr. Homer!" said the young postmaster. "Look up, my dear friend.

You don't suppose we are going to let her come, do you? She shall not put her foot inside the door, I promise you."

Mr. Homer groaned again. "She will come, William!" he said. "I feel it; I know it. She will come, and she will stay. I have not strength to resist her. Oh, Cousin Marcia, Cousin Marcia, you little thought what you were doing when you laid this burden on me. I don't think I can bear it, William! I will go away; I will leave the village. I do — not — think — I can bear it!"

"Oh, I think you can, sir," said Will Jaquith. "Consider the wishes of our dear old friend. Think how hard it would be for us all to see strangers in this house, so full of memories of her. I hope that after awhile you can grow to feel at home, and to be happy here. Then, too, the work will be of a kind that will interest you. The ar-

rangement of all these rare and curious objects, the formation of a museum, — why, Mr. Homer, you are made for the work, and the work for you. Cheer up, my good friend!"

Mr. Homer sighed heavily. "I thank you, William," he said. "I thank you. You are always sympathetic and comforting to me. Your words are — are as balm; as — as dew upon Hermon; as — oil which runs down —" The poor gentleman broke off, and looked piteously at his companion. "My metaphor misleads me," he said. "It is often the case at the present time. I — I am apprehensive that my mind is not what it was; that I am in danger of loss of the intellect; of the — a — power of thought; of the — a — chair, where Reason sits — or in happier days did sit — enthroned. I am a wreck, William, a wreck."

He sighed again, hesitated, and went on.

"All you say is true, my friend, and I could, I think, find much interest and even inspiration in the task entrusted to me by my venerated and deplored relative, if — I could do it in my own way: but — I am hampered, sir. I am — trammelled; I am — a — set upon behind and before. The ladies — a — in short — Hark! what is that?"

He started nervously as a knock was heard at the front door, and clutched Will Jaquith's coat with a feverish grasp. "Don't leave me, William!" he cried. "On no account leave me! It is a woman. I — I — cannot be left alone with them. They come about me — like locusts, William! Listen!"

A wheezy, unctuous voice was heard:

"Mr. Hollopeter feelin' any better today?"

"No, he ain't," came the reply in Direxia's crisp accents.

"I'm real sorry. I've brought him a little relish to eat with his supper. I made it myself, and it's nourishin' and palatable. Shall I take it in to him?"

"I'll take it," said Direxia. "He won't tetch it, I can tell you that."

"You never can tell," said the voice. "Sometimes a new hand will give victuals a freshness. Besides, Homer must be real lonesome. I'm comin' in to set with him a spell, and maybe read him a chapter. I've ben through affliction myself, Direxia, well you know, and the sufferin' seeks their like. You let me in now! You ain't no right to keep me out, Direxia Hawkes. This ain't your house, and I'll take no sarce from you, so now I tell you."

Mr. Homer started from his seat with a wild look, but Will Jaquith laid a quiet hand on his shoulder.

"Sit still, sir!" he said. "I'll take

charge of this one, and Tommy will be back soon. Cheer up, Mr. Homer!"

He passed out. Mr. Homer, listening feverishly, heard a few words spoken in a cheerful, decided voice; then the door closed. Mr. Homer drew a long breath, but started again nervously as Direxia's brown head popped in at the door.

"Mis' Weight brung some stuff," she said, briefly. "Looks like skim-milk blue-monge bet up with tapioky. Want it?"

"No!" cried Mr. Homer, with something as near a snarl as his gentle voice could compass.

"Well, you needn't take my head off!" said Direxia. "I didn't make it. I'll give it to the parrot; he's rugged."

She vanished, and Mr. Homer's head dropped in his hands again.

"Like locusts!" he murmured. "Like locusts! Oh, Cousin Marcia, how could you?"

CHAPTER VII.

CONCHOLOGY AND OTHER THINGS

The two trustees had had a busy day. They had just begun upon the collection of shells which for years had lain packed away in boxes in the attic. There were thousands of them, and now as they lay spread out on long tables in the workshop, the glass-covered room where the Captain used to keep his tools and his turning-lathe, Mr. Homer's mind was divided between admiration of their beauty, and dismay at the clumsiness of the names which Tommy Candy read out — painfully, with finger on the page and frequent moppings of an anxious brow, for the polysyllabic was still something of a

nightmare to Tommy, spite of his twenty years and his Academy diploma.

"Look at this, Thomas," said Mr. Homer, carefully polishing on his sleeve a whorl of rosy pearl. "Observe this marvel of nature, Thomas! This should have a name of beauty, to match its aspect; a name of — a — poetry; of — divine affluence. 'Aurora's Tear' would, I am of opinion, fitly express this exquisite object. Number 742: how does it stand in the volume, Thomas?"

"Spiral Snork," said Thomas.

Mr. Homer sighed, and laid the shell down. "This is sad, Thomas," he said. "This is — a — painful; this is — a — productive of melancholy. I have never been of the opinion — though it is matter of distress to disagree in any opinion with the immortal Bard of Avon — that 'a rose by any other name' — you are doubtless familiar with the quotation, Thomas. To my

mind there is much in a name — much. 'Snork!' The title is repellent; is — a — in a manner suggestive of swine. Pork — snort — snork! the connotation is imperative, I am of opinion. How, why, I ask you, Thomas, should such a name be applied to this exquisite object?"

"Named for Simeon Snork, mariner, who first brought it to England," said Tommy, his finger on the paragraph. "Rare: value ten pounds sterling."

The little gentleman sighed again. "We must put the name down, Thomas," he said. "We must write it clearly and legibly; duty compels us so to do. But do you think that we should be violating our trust if we suggested — possibly in smaller type — the alternative, 'sometimes known as Aurora's Tear'? There could be no harm in that, I fancy, Thomas? It *is* known as Aurora's Tear to me. I can never bring myself to

think of this delicate production of — nature's loom — as 'Spiral — a — Snork.' My spirit rebels; — a — revolts; — a — "

"Jibs?" suggested Tommy Candy.

"I was about to say 'rises up in opposition,'" said Mr. Homer, gently. "Your expression is terse, Thomas, but — a — more colloquial than I altogether — but it is terse, and perhaps expressive. You see no objection to writing the alternative, Thomas?"

"None in life!" said Tommy. "Have ten of 'em if you like, Mr. Homer; give folks their choice."

"A — I think not, Thomas," said Mr. Homer. "I am of opinion that that would be unadvisable. We will put the single alternative, if you please. I thank you. Now to proceed. Here again."

He selected another shell, breathed on it, and rubbed it on his coat-sleeve.

"Here again is an exquisite — a — emanation from nature's loo— I would rather say from nature's workshop. Observe, Thomas, the rich blending of hues, violet and crimson, in this beautiful object. I trust that we shall be more fortunate this time in the matter of nomenclature. Number 743, Thomas. How is it set down in the book?"

"Hopkins's Blob," said Tommy.

"Dear! dear!" said Mr. Homer. "This is sad, Thomas; this is sad, indeed. Blob! a most unlovely word. And yet" — he paused for a moment — "it rhymes — it rhymes with 'sob.' Do me the favor to pause an instant, Thomas. I have an idea: a — an effluence; — a — an abstraction of the spirit into the realms of poesy."

He was silent, while Tommy Candy watched him with twinkling gray eyes. At first the little gentleman's face wore a look

of intense gravity; but soon it lightened. He passed his hand twice or thrice across his brow, and sighed, a long, happy sigh; then he turned a beaming look on his companion.

"I do not know, my young friend," he said, mildly, "whether you have ever given much thought to — a — the Muse; but it may interest you to note the manner in which she occasionally wings her flight. A moment ago, this gracious object" — he waved the shell gently — "was, so far as we are aware, unsung; — a — uncelebrated; — a — lacking its meed of mellifluous expression. Now — but you shall judge, sir. In this brief moment of silence, the following lines crystallized in my brain. Ahem!"

He leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and folded his hands meekly; then began to recite in a kind of runic chant:

"The poet-heart doth sigh,
The poet-soul doth sob,
To see a sight
Of beauty bright
Oppressed by name of 'blob'!

"O cacophonic crowd!
O unmellifluous mob!
The poet's lip
Would nectar sip,
But scorns to browse on 'blob'!

The expression is condensed," said Mr. Homer, with modest pride; "but I am of opinion that condensation often lends strength; — a — are you also of that opinion, Thomas?"

"Every time!" said Tommy Candy.

Mr. Homer looked bewildered, but bowed gently, accepting the commendation expressed in Tommy's voice. "I am glad that my little effusion meets with your approval, Thomas," he said. "It is the first effort I have been able to make since the death of

my lamented relative. A — a simple movement, sir, of the Muse's wing; a — a — "

"Flap?" suggested Tommy Candy.

Mr. Homer looked still more bewildered, but bowed again, waving his hands with a gesture of mingled protest and deprecation.

"I am of opinion, Thomas," he said, "that prose is the vehicle in which your thoughts are most apt to find expression. The wings of the Muse do not, in my opinion, — a — a — flap. But it is a matter — a — scarcely germane to the occasion. We will pursue our researches, if you please."

The next names were more fortunate. The Golden Gem was followed by the Mermaid's Comb, and Mr. Homer glowed with poetic joy as he placed the pretty things on the shelves of the cabinet that awaited them.

"I foresee, Thomas," he exclaimed, joyfully, "a resuscitation of the poetic faculty.

I feel that, surrounded by these shapes of beauty, and not oppressed by such inappropriate cacophonies as Blork and Snob — I would say Snork and Blob — I shall often joyfully, as well as strictly, meditate the — I find myself unable to characterize the Muse as 'thankless,' in spite of my profound admiration for the immortal Milton. My spirit will, I feel it, once more sing, and — wing, sir! 'Mermaid's Comb!' In gazing on this symmetrical shape, my young friend, may we not in our mind's eye, Horatio — I would say Thomas — the remark is Hamlet's, as you are without doubt aware — behold it in the hand of some fair nymph, or siren, or — or person of that description — and behold her 'sleeking her soft alluring locks,' in Milton's immortal phrase? A — candor compels me to state, Thomas, that on the few — the very few — occasions when — when I have seen the locks of the fair

sex in a state of — a — dampness; — of — humidity; — a — of — moisture, I have not thought" (Mr. Homer blushed very red) "that the condition was one which enhanced; which — a — added to, the charms with which that sex is — in a large number of cases — endowed."

"That's so!" said Tommy. "Take 'em after a shampoo, and they're a sight, even the good-lookin' ones."

Mr. Homer blushed still redder, and took out his handkerchief. "I have never, —" he began, and then coughed, and waved the subject delicately away.

"It is probable," he said, "that if — a — such semi-celestial individuals as those described by the poet existed — a — possessed a corporal envelope — a — were endowed with a local habitation and a name — Shakespeare — they would not be subject to conditions which — which tend to the —

a — obscuration of beauty; but we will proceed, if you please, Thomas. Hark! was that a knock at the door?"

They listened. There was a silence; then, beyond question, came a knock on the outer door; a loud, imperative rap, with a suggestion of rhythm, almost of flourish, in its repetition. "Rat-ta-tat, rat-ta-tat, rat-ta-tat!" Then silence again.

"Direxia is in bed," said Tommy Candy. "I'll go."

"Wait; wait a moment, Thomas!" said Mr. Homer, nervously. "Do you think — it is near nine o'clock — do you think that courtesy absolutely demands our opening the door?"

Tommy looked at him in amazement.

"It — it is probably a lady!" said Mr. Homer, piteously. "She is without doubt bringing me — a — food; — a — bodily pabulum; — a — refreshment for the inner

man. Thomas, I—I do not feel as if I *could* receive another dish at present. I have received four — have I not? — assaults — a — I would say, gifts, to-day, all tending to — overtax the digestive powers, even if Direxia's friendly ministrations did not invite — or more properly demand — all the powers of that description which I possess."

"Pineapple cream, Miss Wax," replied Tommy Candy, briefly. "That was good; I ate it myself. Lobster salad, Miss Goby; claws round it; might have boiled her own for a garnish; calf's-foot jelly, Widder Ketchum; plum cake, Mis' Pottle. Seth Weaver says that when Doctor Pottle is short of patients, the old lady always bakes a batch of fruit-cake and sends it round. It's sure to fetch somebody; you could ballast a schooner with it, Seth says. Yes, that makes four, sir. But maybe this isn't a woman, Mr. Homer. I don't think

it sounds like one, and anyhow, I wouldn't let one in, noways. You'd better let me go, sir."

The knock sounded again, still more imperative; and now a voice was heard, a man's voice, thin and high, crying, impatiently: "Within there! house! what ho! within!"

Mr. Homer gasped, and loosened his necktie convulsively.

"My mind is probably failing," he said. "That voice — is probably a hallucination; — a — an aberration; a — you hear no voice, I should surmise, Thomas?"

He gazed eagerly at Tommy, who, really alarmed for his friend's reason, stared at him in return.

"Of course I hear it, sir," he said. "He's hollering fit to raise the roof. Riled, I expect; you'd better let me go, Mr. Homer."

Mr. Homer relaxed his hold. "Thomas,"

"AS HE HELD THE CANDLE HIGH, ITS WAVERING LIGHT FELL ON THE COUNTENANCE OF THE STRANGER"

he said, solemnly, "I think it improbable that you will find any corporal substance at that door: nevertheless, open it, if you will be so good! open it, Thomas!"

Greatly wondering, Tommy Candy ran to the door and flung it wide open. There on the threshold stood a man, his hand raised in the act of knocking again. A little man, in a flyaway cloak, with a flyaway necktie and long, fluttering mustaches; a little man who looked in the dim light like a cross between a bat and the Flying Dutchman.

"House!" said the little man. "Within there!"

"Well," said Tommy, slowly, "I never said it was a monument!"

The stranger made a gesture of brushing him away.

"Minion," he said, "bandy no words, but straightway tell me, does Homer Hollopeter lurk within?"

"Did you wish to see him?" inquired Tommy, civilly yet cautiously. A backward glance over his shoulder gave him a curious impression. Mr. Homer's shadow, as he stood just within the parlor door, was thrown on the pale shining wood of the hall floor; this shadow seemed to flutter, with motions singularly like those of the stranger. Another moment, and the little gentleman came forward, carrying a candle. He was trembling violently, and, as he held the candle high, its wavering light fell on the countenance of the stranger.

"Gee whiz!" muttered Tommy Candy. "It's himself over again in black."

"It is my brother Pindar!" cried Mr. Homer, dropping the candle. "It is my only brother, whom I thought dead — a — defunct; — a — wafted to — my dear fellow, my dear brother, how are you? This is a joyful moment; this is — a — an aus-

picious occasion; this is — a — an oasis in the arid plains which — "

"Encircle us!" said Mr. Pindar. "Precisely! Homer, embrace me!"

He flung his arms abroad, and the batlike cloak fluttered out to its fullest width. Mr. Homer seemed to shrink together, and it was himself he embraced, with a frightened gesture.

"Oh, quite so!" he cried, hurriedly. "Very much so, indeed, my dear brother. The spirit, Pindar, the spirit, returns your proffered salute; but foreign customs, sir, have never obtained in Quahaug. I bid you heartily, heartily welcome, my dear brother. Come in, come in!"

Mr. Pindar flung up his hand with a lofty gesture. "My benison upon this house!" he cried. "The wanderer returns. The traveller — a — sets foot upon his na-

tive heath — I would say door-step. Flourish and exeunt. Set on!"

The two brothers vanished. Tommy Candy, still standing on the threshold, stared after them with his mouth wide open, and slowly rumpled his hair till it stood on end in elfish spikes, as it had done in his childhood.

"I swan!" said Tommy Candy. "I swan to everlastin' gosh! the Dutch is beat this time!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. PINDAR

Tommy Candy was about to reënter the house, when something seemed to attract his attention. He gazed keenly through the soft darkness at the house opposite; then he uttered a low whistle, and, leaning on his stick (for Miss Penny was right; poor Tommy was very lame, and had climbed his last steeple), made his way down the garden-path to the gate. "Annie Lizzie, is that you?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Hush!" the answer came in a soft voice. "Yes, Tommy. How you scared me! I didn't think there was any one up. Ma

thought she heard something, and wanted I should look out and see if there was any one round."

"You tell her the Sheriff has come to get Isaac," said Tommy, "and he's stopping with us overnight. He'll be over in the morning, tell her, with the handcuffs, bright and early."

"Oh, hush, Tommy! you hadn't ought to talk so!" said the soft voice, and a slender figure slipped across the road in the dark, and came to the gate. "Honest, Tommy, I wish you wouldn't talk so about Isaac and the rest of 'em. It don't seem right."

"Annie Lizzie," said Tommy, "I never said a word against ary one of 'em, so long as I thought they was your kin; but since I found out that you was only adopted, why, I don't see no reason why or where-

fore I shouldn't give 'em as good as they deserve, now I don't."

"Well, they did adopt me," said Annie Lizzie. "Don't, Tommy, please! Ma says —"

"She ain't your Ma!" interrupted Tommy; "and I don't want you should call her so, Annie Lizzie; there!"

"Well, she says I would have gone on the town only for them," the soft voice went on. "You wouldn't want I should be ungrateful, would you, Tommy?"

"No, I wouldn't," said Tommy, grimly. "I'm willing you should be grateful for all the chance you've had to wash and scrub and take care of them Weight brats. But this ain't what I called you over for, Annie Lizzie. Say, there did some one come just now; Mr. Homer's brother!"

"I want to know!" said Annie Lizzie. In the darkness, Tommy could almost see

her glow with gentle wonder and curiosity. "What is he like, Tommy? I didn't know Mr. Homer had a brother, nor any one belongin' to him nearer than Mis' Strong."

"No more did I," said Tommy. "But here he is, as like Mr. Homer as two peas, only he's a black one."

"For gracious' sake, Tommy Candy! you don't mean a colored man?"

"No, no! I mean dark-complected, with black eyes. You make an errand over to-morrow, and you'll see him. He looks to be a queer one, I tell you!"

"If he's as good as Mr. Homer," said Annie Lizzie, "I shouldn't care how queer he was."

"No more should I," cried Tommy, warmly; "but he'd have to work pretty hard to ketch up with Mr. Homer in goodness. Say, Annie Lizzie, come a mite nearer, can't you?"

"I can't, Tommy. I must go home this minute; Ma will be wonderin' where I am. There! do let me go, Tommy!"

A window was raised in the house opposite, and the wheezy voice of Mrs. Weight was heard:

"Annie Lizzie, where are you? Don't you l'iter there now, and me ketchin' my everlastin' hollerin' for you. Come in this minute, do you hear?"

There was a soft sound that was not a voice; and Annie Lizzie slipped back like a shadow across the road.

"I'm comin', Ma!" she said. "It's real warm and pleasant out, but I'm comin' right in."

"Do you see any one round?" asked the Deacon's widow.

Annie Lizzie shut her eyes tight, for she was a truthful girl. "No'm," she said; "I don't."

In the Captain's room, Mr. Homer's favorite apartment, the two brothers stood and looked each other in the face. As Tommy said, the likeness was intimate, spite of the difference in color: the same figure, the same gestures, the same general effect of waviness in outline, of flutter in motion; yet, to speak in paradox, with a difference in the very likeness. There was an abruptness of address in the newcomer, foreign to the gentle ambiguous flow of Mr. Homer's speech; where Mr. Homer waved, Mr. Pindar jerked; where Mr. Homer fluttered feebly, his brother fluttered vivaciously. They fluttered now, both of them, as they stood facing each other. For a moment neither found words, but it was Mr. Pindar who spoke first.

"I have surprised you, brother!" he cried; "confess it! Surprise, chief tidbit at the Feast of Life! Alarums and excur-

sions! enter King Henry, with forces marching. You did not expect to see the Wanderer?"

"I certainly did not, my dear brother!" cried Mr. Homer, the tears standing in his mild eyes. "I have not even felt sure, Pindar, of your being alive in these latter years. Why, why have you kept this silence, my dear fellow? think how many years it is since I have heard a word from you!"

Mr. Pindar fluttered vivaciously; he was certainly more like a bat than the Flying Dutchman. "I apologize!" he cried. "I have been at fault, Homer, I admit it. To own him wrong, the haughty spirit bows — no more of it! The past" — he swept it away with one wing — "is buried. This night its obsequies! Hung be the heavens with black; a pickaxe and a spade, a spade; other remarks of a similar nature. Homer, our cousin Marcia loved me not!" (it was

true. "I can stand a beetle," Mrs. Tree was used to say, "or I can stand a bat; but a bat-beetle, and a dancing one at that, is more than I can abide. Cat's foot! don't talk to me!").

"Yet when I heard — through the medium of the public prints — that she was no more, I felt a pang, sir, a pang. I would have assisted at the funeral solemnities; it would have been a pleasure to me to compose a dirge; the first strophe even suggested itself to me. 'Ta-ta, tarum, tarum' (muffled drums); 'ta tee, ta tidol' (trombones); but these things require time, sir, time."

"Surely!" said Mr. Homer, with a meek bow; "surely; and indeed, Pindar, the ceremonies were of the simplest description, in accordance with the wishes of our revered and deceased relative. But sit down, my dear brother; sit down, and let me procure some refreshment; — a — sustenance; — a —

bodily pabulum, for you. Have you come far, may I ask?"

"From the metropolis, sir; from New York!" replied Mr. Pindar, seating himself and throwing back his little batlike cloak.

"By rail to the Junction; the evening stage, a jolt, a rattle, and a crawl, — behold me! A crust, Homer, a crust! no disturbance of domestic equilibrium. A consort lurks within?"

"I beg your pardon, Brother!" said Mr. Homer, with a bewildered look.

"A wife, sir, a wife!" said Mr. Pindar. "Are you married, Homer?"

"Oh, no; no, indeed, my dear brother!" said Mr. Homer, hastily, and blushing very red. "Nothing of the kind, I assure you. And you?"

"Perish the thought!" said Mr. Pindar; and he waved the Sex out of existence.

Mr. Homer looked troubled, but hastened out of the room, and, after some ineffective appeals to Tommy, who, as we know, was talking with Annie Lizzie at the gate, foraged for himself, and returned with crackers and cheese, doughnuts and cider. Seated together at this simple feast, the two brothers looked at each other once more, and both rubbed their hands with precisely the same gesture.

"Food!" cried Mr. Pindar, vivaciously; "and drink! necessities, base if you will, but grateful, sir, grateful! Brother, I pledge you!"

"Brother, I drink to you!" cried Mr. Homer, filling his glass with a trembling hand. "To our reunion, sir! the — the rekindling of — of affection's torch, my dear brother. Long may it —"

"Blaze!" cried Mr. Pindar, with a sudden skip in his chair. "Snap! crackle!

flame! crepitate! Pindar to Homer shall, bright glass to glass — enough!" He ceased suddenly, and fell upon the crackers and cheese with excellent appetite.

Mr. Homer watched him in anxious and bewildered silence: once or twice he opened his lips as if about to speak, but closed them each time with a sigh and a shake of the head. The visitor was the first to speak, beginning, when the last cracker had disappeared, as suddenly as he had left off.

"Brother," he said, "why am I here?"

Mr. Homer repeated the words vaguely: "Why are you here, my dear brother? I doubt not that affection's call, the — voice of sympathy, of — a — brotherhood, of — consanguinity, — a — sounded in your ears — "

"Trumpets!" Mr. Pindar struck a sonorous note, and nodded thrice with great solemnity. "Alarums and excursions; enter

long-lost brother, centre. You are right, Homer; but this was not all. The Dramatic Moment, sir, had struck."

With these words, he folded his arms, and, dropping his head on his breast, gazed up through his eyebrows in a manner which Mr. Homer found highly disconcerting.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Homer, with vague politeness.

"Struck!" repeated Mr. Pindar, nodding solemnly. "Sounded. Knelled—no! tolled—not precisely! larumed, sir, larumed!"

"'Larumed' is a fine word," said Mr. Homer, meekly, "but I fail to apprehend your precise meaning, Brother Pindar."

"You know what 'dramatic' means, I suppose, Homer," replied Mr. Pindar, testily, "though you never had an atom of the quality in your composition. And you know what a moment is. The Dramatic Moment — I repeat it — in your life and the life of

this village — has larumed, sir. Listen to it, Homer; look upon it, sir; grasp it! The old order — gone!" he swept it away. "The new — its foot upon the threshold!" he beckoned toward the door, and Mr. Homer looked round nervously. "Usher it in, to sound of trump and drum. We must celebrate, Homer, celebrate. To that end, behold me!"

Mr. Homer passed his hand across his brow and sighed wearily. "My dear brother," he said, "you must excuse me if I do not yet altogether understand, — a — comprehend, — a — accord the hospitality of the intellect, to — to the idea that you desire to convey. I feel little if any resemblance at this moment to a watcher of the skies — Keats, as I need not remind you; but I cannot feel that this is a time for rejoicing, Pindar."

"For celebration, sir! for celebration!"

cried Mr. Pindar, eagerly. "The words are not synonymous, as you are no doubt aware. Let the mysteries be solemn, if you will, the sable scarf of cinerary pomp, the muffled drum, and wail of deep bassoon; but this was my idea, sir; thus the vision rose before my mind's eye, Horatio, — I would say, Homer. A procession, sir. Maidens, white-clad, flower-crowned, scattering roses; matrons, in kirtle and gown, twirling the distaff; village elders, in — in — our native costume is ill adapted, I confess, but suitable robes might be obtained at trifling cost, sir, at trifling cost. You in the midst, crowned with bays, the poet's robe your manly limbs enfolding. Following, — or preceding, as you will, — musicians, with brass instruments. You write an ode, I set it to music. Rhymes will readily suggest themselves: 'jog,' no! 'clog;' hardly! 'agog;' precisely!

"Ta-ta, ta-ta, with joy agog;
Quahaug! (bang!) Quahaug! (bang!) Quahaug!

Kettledrums, you understand; cymbals; superb effect! You see it, Homer? you take it in?"

He paused, and gazed on his brother with kindling eyes, his arms extended, the little cloak fluttering from them; certainly nothing human ever looked so like a bat.

"A goblin!" said Mr. Homer to himself. "My only brother is a goblin!"

He sighed again, yet more wearily, and once more passed his hand across his brow.

"My dear brother," he said, "the hour is late. I find myself incapable of — of thought. The weary pinion of the brain — I find myself incapable even of metaphor, sir. You must excuse me. To-morrow —"

"To fresh fields and pastures new!" cried Mr. Pindar, rising with a batlike

wave. "Precisely! Enter attendants with torches. The minion waits without?"

"Oh!" said Mr. Homer, "not exactly, Pindar. Direxia Hawkes has — a — retired to rest; has — a — sought the sleep which — which — "

"Knits up the ravelled sleeve of care!" suggested Mr. Pindar.

"Oh, very much so!" cried Mr. Homer. "You surely remember Direxia, brother, and will no doubt agree with me that the term 'minion' cannot properly be applied to Cousin Marcia's old and faithful retainer. And — the youth who — who admitted you, is Thomas Candy, my friend and fellow trustee. Thomas is an invaluable person, Pindar; he is like a son to me, I assure you. You will, I am sure, value Thomas. I will suggest to him the advisability of bringing candles. Oh, here he is! Thomas, this is my brother Pindar, my only

brother, returned after the lapse of many years to — to his native heath, if I may so express myself. Thomas Candy, my dear brother!"

"Son of Silas?" cried Mr. Pindar. "Ha! 'tis well. Stripling, thy hand! lives yet thy father, ha?"

Tommy grinned, and rumpled his hair with an elfish look eminently unfitting a trustee.

"You are the one he used to play ghost with, and scare the Weightses," he said. "I've heard of you, sir. Father isn't livin', but Mis' Tree told me about it. Glad to see you, sir!"

CHAPTER IX.

"QUAND ON CONSPIRE"

Mr. Pindar Hollopeter slept long and late the next morning, as became a gentleman of metropolitan habits; he had not yet made his appearance when Will Jaquith came swinging along the street and turned in at the gate. Tommy Candy was at work in the garden, trimming the roses, as Will himself had been used to do before he was a family man and a postmaster, and at sight of him Will stopped.

"Just the man I was looking for, Tom!" he said. "I want to consult you."

"Same here!" said Tommy, straighten-

ing himself and looking over the sweetbriar bush. "What's up your way?"

"This!" said Will, taking a postal card from his pocket. "I don't make a practice of reading postal cards, Tom, but I thought I'd better do it this time, as I recognized the handwriting;" and he read aloud: "'Expect me to-morrow at eleven, for the day. M. Darracott Pryor.'"

"Gee!" said Tommy Candy.

"Whiz!" said Will Jaquith. "Exactly. Now what are we to do? I promised Mr. Homer that she should not torment him."

"And I promised Her," said Tommy, slowly ("Her" was Mrs. Tree, once and for all time, with Tommy Candy), "that that woman should never stay in this house. Didn't I tell you? It was the last time ever I was sittin' with her. I'll never forget it; she knew she hadn't long to stay, for as brisk and chirk as she was; she knew it right

enough. 'Tommy,' she says, 'when I'm gone, I look to you to keep cats off the place; do you hear?' She couldn't abide cats, you know. I says, 'There sha'n't any cat come on the place if I can help it, Mis' Tree,' I says, 'and I expect I can.' I didn't have no *i*dea at first what she meant. She raps her stick and looks at me. Gorry! when she looked at you, she hadn't hardly no need to speak; her eyes did the talkin'. 'Cats!' she says. 'Four-legged cats, two-legged cats. Cats that say "miaouw!" cats that say "Maria!" keep 'em off, Tommy! worry 'em, Tommy! worry 'em! do you hear?'

"'I hear, Mis' Tree,' I says, 'and I'll do it.'

"'Good boy, Tommy!' she says; and she pulls out the table-drawer, same as she always did — Gorry! I can't talk about it!" His voice faltered, and he turned away. "She was my best friend!" he said, brok-

enly; "she was the best friend ever a fellow had."

"Mine, too, Tommy," said Will, laying his hand kindly on the lad's shoulder. "We'll think of her together, boy, and we'll carry out her wishes if it takes a — "

He checked himself, with a glance at the stick that never left Tommy's side; but Tommy finished the sentence simply:

"A leg! that's what we'll do. I'd give my good leg, let alone the poor one; I shouldn't have had that if it hadn't been for her; if she hadn't sent for Doctor Strong that day. Old Pottle was going to take it off, you know. 'I'll take off your ears first!' she says, and 'rap' goes her stick. 'Ninnyhammer!' she says; 'noodle!' she says; 'send for Geoffrey Strong.' That rap was the first thing I heard; I believe it brought me back, too, from — from wher-

ever there is. Gorry! I wish't I could bring her back!"

"We cannot do that, Tommy," said Will Jaquith, sadly; "but what we can do, we will. Now about this — lady!"

"Look-a-here!" said Tommy, eagerly. "I don't believe but what this fays in with what has been goin' on here. Last night —" and he told briefly of the advent of Mr. Pindar.

"He's plum crazy," he added, "crazy as a loon; but yet it's a knowin' kind of crazy, and I don't believe but what he could help us."

Will pondered. "I should not wonder if he could, Tom," he said at length. "I'd like to see him, anyhow. Where is he, and where is Mr. Homer?"

"Mr. Homer's gone for a walk," said Tommy. "He was all worked up about his brother's comin', and some kind of rinktum

he wants to get up, here in the village; kind of crazy circus, near as I could make out from the little he said. He didn't eat hardly any breakfast, and Direxia was in a caniption, so I got him to go for a walk in the woods, to ca'm him down. That ca'ms him down better than 'most anything, generally, unless it's Miss Wax's barrel-organ, and she's busy mornin's. Come in, Will. The other one wasn't down when I come out, but I presume likely he is now. I tell you he's a queer one!"

They went in; and, sure enough, Mr. Pindar was in the dining-room, eating toast and marmalade, and holding forth to Direxia Hawkes, who stood in the doorway, half-admiring, half-distrustful. Her early opinion of Pindar Hollopeter had been unfavorable, but he certainly had an elegant way with him, and used beautiful language.

"The orange," he was saying, as he waved

a spoonful of the translucent sweetmeat, "has ever been the friend of man; unless, indeed, we share the view of those who hold that it was the original Apple of Discord. The answer to this theory would appear to lie in the fact that it is not an apple at all. But soft! whom have we here? A stranger! alarums and entrances. Enter mysterious individual, r. u. e."

"It's Willy Jaquith and Tommy," said Direxia. "I'll go now; if you want more toast, you can ring the bell."

"Good morning, sir!" said Tommy, advancing. "I hope you slept well. Let me make you acquainted with Mr. Jaquith; this is Mr. Homer's brother, Will, that I was telling you about."

"I am glad to meet you, sir!" said Will. "Mr. Homer is a great friend of mine."

Mr. Pindar rose, and held out his hand with a superb gesture.

"My brother's friends," he said, "find safe asylum in this rugged breast. Sir, I salute you. Can I offer you refreshment — the wheaten loaf, the smooth, unrifled egg, the bland emollience of the butter-pat? No?"

"Thanks!" said Will. "I have breakfasted, Mr. Hollopeter; but don't let me interrupt you. Thanks." He seated himself in response to a magnificent wave. "Pray finish your breakfast, sir!"

But Mr. Pindar had apparently finished, and was besides in a communicative mood. After explaining to them at great length the theory of Até's apple, he gave them a brief disquisition on the proper boiling of eggs, touched lightly on the use of butter among the Hebrews, and then, to their great delight, proceeded to advert to his own coming. It was a sudden inspiration, he informed them. Some thirty years had blos-

somed o'er his head since his foot had trod the soil from which he sprang. He left, a stripling in his early flower; he returned — "what you see!" His gesture transformed the little shabby bat-cloak into an ermine mantle. "A son of Thespis, gentlemen, at your command!"

Tommy opened wide eyes at this, having always heard that Mr. Hollopeter senior had rejoiced in the name of Ecclesiastes Nudd; but Will bowed respectfully in response to the wave. "An actor, sir?" he asked, deferentially.

Mr. Pindar bowed and waved again.

"Actor, dramatist, musician, composer!

> "By many names men know me,
> In many lands I dwell;
> Well Philadelphia knows me,
> Manhattan knows me well.

A man of cities, sir, of cities! I have come to assist at the celebration of the New Order,

and shall be glad to count you among my aids." Here Mr. Pindar bowed profoundly, twirled his mustaches, fluttered his wings, and proceeded to unfold his scheme of a Processional Festival Jubilee, matrons, maidens, distaffs, and all. He declared that Will was the very figure of Apollo, and that Tommy, on account of his lameness, was evidently created for the part of Vulcan.

"A disparity of years, I grant you, my young friend," he said, graciously; "but what! the gods were young when time was. The Boy Hephæstos! what say you?"

Tommy Candy, probably for the first time in his young life, found nothing to say; but Will pronounced the scheme a most interesting one. Before going fully into it, however, he said, he was anxious to consult Mr. Pindar on a matter connected with his brother.

Mr. Pindar bowed again, still more pro-

foundly, and crossing his arms on his breast, nodded thrice, each time more impressively than the last.

"Concerning Homer!" he said. "My father's son; my mother's fair-haired joy; in short, my brother. Gentles, say on; my ears are all your own."

"We have — learned," Will began cautiously, "that a visitor is coming here this morning whom we think Mr. Homer would greatly prefer not to see. The lady is a cousin of yours, sir; Mrs. Pryor, formerly Miss Darracott — "

He stopped, for Mr. Pindar fixed him with a gleaming eye and an outstretched forefinger, and uttered one word.

"Maria?"

"The same!" said Will.

"Maria!" repeated Mr. Pindar. "Ye gods! Strike home, young man! my bosom to the knife — strike home!"

"Mr. Homer has dreaded her coming," said Will, taking courage; "and Mrs. Tree — a — did not — was not fond of her, we will say. We thought that you might possibly help us, sir, in devising some plan by which, without being uncivil, we might spare Mr. Homer the distress which — which an interview with this lady could hardly fail to give him."

Mr. Pindar still looked fixedly at him. "Maria!" he muttered once more. "My boyhood's knotted scourge! the most horrid child that ever — What does she want?"

"She desires to be a sister to Mr. Homer, sir," said Will, simply.

Mr. Pindar recoiled. "Perish the thought!" he exclaimed. "Sepulchred deep the curst conception lie! and you? ye seek assistance, ha?"

"We thought you might be able to help us out, sir," said Will.

"I bet you could fix her!" said Tommy.

Mr. Pindar's eyes flashed. "Your hands!" he cried. "The Dramatic Moment strikes. Ding dong! But soft; we must dissemble!"

Mr. Pindar laid his finger on his lips, and rolled his eyes on his visitors with a warning glance. Then rising, he stole with measured and elaborately noiseless steps to the door, and listened at the keyhole, then to the window, and peered out with dramatic caution; then, still with his finger on his lips, he turned to his companions.

"All is well!" he said; he waved the little bat-cloak, and then drew it round him with a flap of mystery.

"Approach!" he whispered, beckoning the two friends toward him. "Conspiracy is the soul of Drama: approach, friends, and give — or rather receive — the countersign!"

It was a pleasant sight to see Mr. Pindar Hollopeter, his eyes gleaming with dramatic fire, yet with a twinkle in the black depths of them, waving his arms abroad (the gesture so like his brother's, yet so unlike), expounding, suggesting, illustrating. It was pleasant, too, to see the responsive twinkle that danced and deepened in the blue and gray eyes as they met his.

"I said you would fix it, sir!" cried Tommy Candy, smiting his thigh.

"That will be capital, sir!" said Will. "Your coming seems really providential just at this time. Of course we could not have shown any incivility to a member of your family; but if you can arrange this —"

"Sir," said Mr. Pindar, dropping his head forward, and gazing up through his eyebrows. "I know not 'if.' Regard the thing as done!"

Punctually at eleven o'clock, Mrs. Pryor bustled and crackled up the garden path, and rang a defiant peal at the bell. She had brought no luggage with her; this was a preliminary skirmish, so to speak, merely to try her ground and assert her rights; but she was prepared to do fierce battle with Direxia Hawkes or any one else who might attempt to impede her progress in the Path of Duty. Accordingly, when she heard footsteps approaching along the hall, she stood with heaving breast and glittering eye, ready and determined to effect an entrance the instant a crack of the door should be opened.

But there was no question of a crack this time. The door swung open to its fullest extent, and, instead of the small and warlike figure of Direxia Hawkes, it was Tommy Candy who stood on the threshold, with subdued and sorrowful looks.

"How do you do, Mis' Pryor?" he said.

"I'm rejoiced you have come. I took the liberty of reading your postal, and it seemed as though I couldn't hardly wait till eleven o'clock came. We need you here, the wust way, Mis' Pryor."

Mrs. Pryor's bristling panoply smoothed itself, and she even gave an approving look at the youth, who certainly was a good-looking youth, and had probably been subjected to evil influences in his childhood.

"I am glad that I have come at the right moment, Tommy," she said, benignly. "People sometimes say that when I come, it is apt to be the right moment, but we will not speak of that now. What is wrong? Have you had difficulty in getting rid of the old woman? I will attend to that with pleasure; it is my duty." And she stepped into the hall, Tommy making way for her with alacrity.

"Oh, no'm," said Tommy. "It wasn't

that; I don't suppose you could hire Direxia to stay — now!"

"What do you mean?" asked the visitor. "What has happened? Mr. Homer is not ill? nothing contagious, I —" and she made a step backward.

"Oh, no'm!" said Tommy, mournfully. "No, I never heard of its bein' contagious, any more than a person couldn't stand it long; but now you have come, you will see to everything, I expect, and how thankful shall we be. This way, mum!" and he opened the parlor door.

"There can't but one go in at a time," he whispered. "It excites him too much; but he's ben pretty quiet this last hour or so; I guess there won't be no danger, not for a spell at least."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Pryor, in alarm. "Tell me at once what has happened, Thomas Candy!"

Tommy shook his head sadly, and turned away with something like a sob. "You'll find out soon enough!" he murmured. "There's things you don't care to put into words. I'm real glad you've come, Mis' Pryor."

"I can't tell you all he said," said Tommy over the garden gate that evening, "for I wasn't in the room. I couldn't hear only a scrap now and again, when he'd give a kind of screech; but you'd sworn, to look at him, it was Mr. Homer gone crazy. He looks like him, anyway, and he put on one of his co'ts and blue neckties, and sort of flopped his hair down over his forehead, — I tell ye, he was complete! and of course she never suspicioned anything about the other — Mr. Pindar — bein' in the land of the livin', or this part of it anyway. We had the room darkened, and he sot there hunched

up in a big chair with his back to the light, sort o' mutterin' to himself, when I shew her in.

"I kinder prepared her mind, just as he told me, and she felt a mite scary, I guess; well, Annie Lizzie, he did the rest; I had no part or lot in it. I tell you he's a circus, that man! I heard him ask her right off the first thing would she marry him, and be his young gazelle: that pleased her, and yet she was took aback a mite, and said: 'Oh, Homer, this is very sudden!'

"'We'll be married by candle-light,' he says, 'and go off in a balloon, by registered mail. The Emperor of China is expecting us to tea; we are to wear our skulls outside, and cross-bones in our clustering locks. Hark to the wedding knell! tzing boom! tzing boom! cymbals and bass drum!'

"I heard that plain, but then he went on muttering for a spell, and I couldn't make

out a word, till she said, kinder sharp and twittery: 'I must go now, Homer; I have an important engagement;' and she said something about coming back soon. But he hollers out:

> "'Black sperits and white,
> Red sperits and gray,
> Mingle, mingle, mingle,
> Ye that mingle may!'

And I heard them fussin' round, as if she was tryin' to get out the room and he was keepin' between her and the door. At last and finally, he must have got right up close't the door, for I heard him as plain as I do you. 'Rats and bears! rats and bears!' he says, 'all over the room! all over the room! look at 'em! look at 'em!' She let one yell out — that was the one you heard — and come runnin' out, and he come as fur as the door after her, flappin' his arms and hoppin' up and down — great Jonas! I ex-

pect she'd ben runnin' now if she hadn't have caught the down stage. I tell ye, I won't forget that one while."

"Oh, Tommy!" said Annie Lizzie, in her soft, reproachful voice. "I think 'twas awful mean to scare a lady that way, now I do. I don't think you'd oughter have done it; 'twasn't pretty actin', no way, shape, or manner, don't tell me it was."

"Annie Lizzie," said Tommy, "you don't know Mis' Pryor; you warn't nothin' but a child when she was here before. There's some folks you *have* to scare; it's the only way to git red of 'em, and we *had* to git red of her. Let alone what Mis' Tree said to me the last time ever I saw her, — though that was enough for me, and what she said goes, as long as I live, — but let that alone, do you think we was goin' to let that woman set right down on Mr. Homer, and smother him with sarce? I guess not. If Prov'-

dence hadn't sent his brother right in the nick of time, Will and me'd have had to do it ourselves, and like as not made a mess of it, and Mr. Homer found out, and ben worked up worse than what he is now; but, as it was, it was all done in the family, and there warn't a word said but what was polite, if 'twas crazy. He couldn't do no more than ask her to marry him, could he?"

"Oh, well, Tommy, you can always talk!" said Annie Lizzie.

"There's other things I can do besides talk," said Tommy Candy; and he did one of them.

"Tommy!" said Annie Lizzie. "How you act!"

CHAPTER X.

A PLEASANT HOUR

One of the spots I have always liked best in Quahaug (it is hard for me even now not to say "Elmerton," though I highly approve the change) is Salem Rock's back yard. The front yard is the special province of Mrs. Rock, a person whose mind runs to double petunias, and coleus; but the back premises are Salem's own, and quaint and homely as himself. A neat path of oyster shells pounded fine runs straight from the back porch to the little pier where the white dory lies sunning herself, and the sail-boat dips and rises on the ripple. On either side of the path is a square space of green,

with a few ancient apple-trees here and there, a white lilac-bush, and a little round summer-house so overgrown with honeysuckle and clematis, and so clustered round by bees that it looks like a quaint flowering beehive itself. There are real beehives, too, six of them, set along the wall; and in a narrow border that runs all round the yard are the flowers that bees like best, sweet rocket and foxglove, mignonette and sweet alyssum, and a dozen others. All these pleasant things may be found in other back yards, but there are some things that belong to this alone. In the exact centre of one green space is a ship's spar, set upright, with a tiny flag fluttering from its top; in the other stand two life-size figures, facing each other; the figures of a man and a woman. The man is in the dress of the thirties, high stock and collar, shirt-frill and frock-coat; the lady in flowing classical

draperies; the man is painted in lively colors, his coat and wig (it is certainly a wig!) a bright snuff-brown, his eyes and waistcoat sky-blue, his cheeks and stock a vivid crimson; but the lady is all white, cheeks, lips, robes and all; she might be marble, if she were less palpably wood. The most singular thing about this singular pair is that they seem to be coming up out of the earth; to have got out as far as their knees, and then to have given it up and stopped. It is evident that they are not coming any farther, for the grass grows close about them, and a wild convolvulus has crept up into the lady's lap and round her arm, making the prettiest of bracelets; while, actually, a yellow warbler has built his nest in the gentleman's shirt-frill, and sings there all summer long.

There the two stand, facing each other,

with cheerful looks; and there they have stood for fifty years.

On a certain pleasant morning, about the time of which I am writing, Salem Rock and Seth Weaver were having what they called their annual spree. Seth had brought his brushes and a variety of paint-pots; Salem, according to custom, had provided tobacco, and a great stone pitcher containing ginger, molasses, and water, with plenty of ice tinkling in it. This pitcher was set down between the two images, within reach of either man: Seth was at work on the white lady, while Salem, with infinite and loving care, went over the gentleman's attire, picking out the waistcoat pattern, and doing wonderful things to the buttons with a tiny brush dipped in gold leaf.

"Old Sir's goin' to look tasty this time, now I tell ye!" he said, drawing back, with his head on one side, to study the effect.

"I've give him a yeller sprig to his vest, see? I expect Old Marm'll say 'yes' this time, for as long as she's held out."

"Yes!" grumbled Seth, pipe in mouth. "You never let me have a chanst at him, nor yet you won't let me brisk the Old Lady up to match. Give her a pink dress now, and hair her up some, and she'd be a fine-lookin' woman as there is in this village. I'll do it, too, some night; you'll see."

"No, you don't!" said Salem, slowly, as he drew a scarlet line down the seams of "Old Sir's" coat. "White Old Marm begun, and white she'll stay. Wal, you was beginnin' to tell me about this ruction up to Home's. What is it Pindar's after? I ain't seen him yet."

"He's after a strait-weskit, and he'll get it, don't you have no fears!" replied Seth. "He calls it a Pro-cessional Festival Jubilee. He's hired the band from the Corners,

and he's got the women-folks churned up till they don't know whether they're butter or cheese. They're routin' out all their old clo'es from up attic, and tryin' of 'em on, and cacklin' — there! I thought I'd heerd hens before; but this mornin' I was in to Penny's store, and there was a passel of 'em in there talkin' it over, and I tell you there ain't a hen-yard in this State to ekal it. I come away without my bird seed. Gorry! there's times when it feels good to be a single man."

"That may be so, Seth," replied Mr. Rock, soberly; "but there's other times — meal-times, and rheumatiz, and such — when it ain't so handy. How does Homer feel about all this ran-tan?"

"Poor old Home!" said Seth, shaking his head. "He's pooty well broke up. He was jest beginnin' to take notice, and get used to things the new way, and sense it

that it warn't goin' to kill him to have money in the bank; and now comes Pindar, flappin' and squeakin' like a ravin'-distracted June-bug, and stands him on his head, and he don't know where he is again; Home don't, I mean. He never could stand up against Pindar, you know. You remember at school we used to call 'em Loony and Moony; Homer was Moony. We used to call after 'em —

"'Loony and Moony,
Both got spoony,
Dance for Mame when she plays 'em a toony.'

There! I ain't thought o' that for thirty years, I don't believe. There never was a single mite o' harm in Homer that I could see."

"I left school before they come," said Salem. "I was on my fust voyage with Cap'n time they got there. But I ric'llect

old Mis' Hollopeter, and the way she used to ride round in that old carryall of her'n. I can see her now, settin' straight as a broomstick, holdin' up that little mite of a green parasol. Covered carryall, too; I remember I used to wonder what on airth she wanted with that parasol."

"Mebbe 'twas charity for the neighbors," said Seth. "She didn't handsome much, old Mis' Hollopeter didn't. I rec'llect the carryall, too. When the boys got big enough, one of them would drive her, and she'd set there and pour poetry into him like corn into a hopper. Home asked me to go one day, and I was so scairt I like t' ha' died. Not but what the old lady meant well, for she did; but what I mean is, them boys never had no chanst to *be* boys — not like other boys do. Who's this comin'?"

There was a flutter of pink beside the great mallow-bush at the corner of the house;

a slender girl appeared, and paused bashfully, with a doubtful smile.

"'Tis Annie Lizzie!" said Salem Rock. "Nice little gal! Come in, Annie Liz, come in! there's no one here only Seth and me. What can we do for ye? Want me to touch up them cheeks with a mite of this red paint? 'Pears to me they ain't quite so rosy as common."

Both men looked approvingly at the girl as she came slowly toward them across the grass. Annie Lizzie never seemed in haste; she was in fact rather slow, but it was a soft, graceful slowness, and her motions were so pretty that one could not wish to hurry them. Everything about the girl was soft, gentle, leisurely; she had little to say, but that little was so pleasantly said, and her soft voice lingered so sweetly over the vowels, that one was sorry when she had done speaking.

She smiled very sweetly on the two middle-aged men. "Good mornin', Mr. Rock," she said. "'Mornin', Mr. Weaver! Ma sent me on an errand to you, Mr. Weaver; I went to the shop fust, and then I thought likely you might be here, so I come along down."

"Yes!" said Seth. "You knew it was about time for all the foolishness there is in Salem Rock to bust out in paint. Look at the figuree he's makin' out of Old Sir there!"

"Yay-us!" said Annie Lizzie, admiringly. "Don't he look nice? I think he's real handsome, Mr. Rock."

Salem Rock nodded, and gave a grunt of satisfaction. "Seth's jealous," he said. "Don't you take no notice of him, Annie Lizzie!"

"She'll hev to take notice of me," said

Seth, "or she won't get what she come for. What does your Ma want, little gal?"

"She wanted to know if you was comin' to paint the stairs to-morrow. This festival comin' on and all, she says she's ashamed to have 'em look as they doos."

"The festival ain't goin' up her back stairs, is it?" asked Seth. "I wish it was, and out the back winder and across lots to Tom Fool's Pastur, where it come from."

"Why, Mr. Weaver, how you talk!" said Annie Lizzie, in soft reproach. "I think it'll be elegant. I'm jest as excited about it!"

"Think likely!" grunted Seth. "What kind o' figuree is Pindar goin' to make out of you, young un? Psyche? Wal, it takes all kinds! You tell your Ma them stairs'll have to wait a spell. There's too many folks wantin' the outside o' their cups and platters done up, tell her, for me to 'tend to the

"'BILE IN, SALEM!' SAID SETH WEAVER, 'YOU AIN'T FORGOT, HAVE YE?'"

insides yet awhile. I'll get round to it bumby, tell her; if ever I get done with this job!" he added, tilting back on his heels, and surveying the white lady. "I s'pose you've got to have three co'ts on her, Sale?"

"That's what!" said Salem. "I'd never skimp Old Marm in her co'ts, not if I had to go in my shirt-sleeves to do it."

"Mr. Rock," said Annie Lizzie, "you promised me you'd tell me some day about those images, and you never. What do they represent, may I ask? They ain't man and wife, be they?"

"I guess not!" said Seth, with a chuckle. "I never heard 'em jaw each other, many times as I've been over 'em. Tell her about 'em, Sale. Annie Lizzie, you set down, and he'll tell the stories now, or, if he won't, I will."

"Sho!" said Salem Rock. "What's the use of rakin' up old stories? These two

figgers have set here so long they don't need no stories; they jest belong here, same as the trees doos."

"But I *love* stories, Mr. Rock!" said Annie Lizzie, in her soft, pleading voice. "Do tell me, Mr. Rock, now please!"

She sat down on the grass, and gathered her pink skirts round her: she might have been a great, soft rose dropped on the green.

"Bile in, Salem!" said Seth Weaver. "You ain't forgot, have ye?"

CHAPTER XI.

SPINNING YARNS

"No, I ain't forgot," said the older man, slowly; "nor like to forget."

He laid his brush down carefully after a critical glance at "Old Sir's" buttons.

"I guess mebbe I'll let them buttons dry a spell before I put on the last co't," he said. "No, I ain't forgot, Seth; but it takes a kind of a h'ist to get back into things that seems so long ago you kinder think they must have happened to somebodys else beside yourself.

"Wal, little gal, these two figgers is figgerheads, you see: kem off two ships I sailed

in long before your two bright eyes opened on to this world of sin and — "

"Deestruction!" said Seth Weaver. "Chirk up a mite, Salem! This ain't a funeral, is it?"

"I dono but 'tis, kind of," said Salem Rock, soberly. "It's amazin' how many folks is dead and buried nowadays. Howsoever, them was two good ships, the *Merchant Cap'n* and the *White Lady*. Old Sir here, he come off the *Cap'n;* they made her over into a barge, and I begged for him, and they let me have him. The builder meant him for a kind of compliment to Cap'n Tree; sing'lar compliment, *I* used to think. Cap'n Tree was a pictur' of a man, if ever I sot eyes on one, and Old Sir always resembled a wooden image, and no special reason why he shouldn't.

"Wal, I took my fust voyage in the *Merchant Cap'n;* I was cabin-boy, and Mis'

Tree was along; it was the last voyage but one they took together, him and her, and I was along on both. Wal, sir, I tell you 'twas a sight to see them two sail a ship together. He'd taught her navigation, and she took to it like them bees to that rocket yonder. She was as good a navigator as ever I see. We was tradin' round Borneo ways, and had laid in a cargo of spices and truck, and started on the homeward voyage. Come up a hurricane, and blowed us clear'n out of our course; went on blowin', and kep' us hitherin' and thitherin' for three days, till we didn't know where we was, nor hardly whether we was in this world at all, or that part of the next that we wasn't anyways particklar *about* bein' in. The third night of it was the wust, and, gorry! I tell ye 'twas awful! and then all of a suddin, like takin' off your hat, it fell dead calm. When mornin' broke, 'twas wuss yet, for there was

land dead ahead, and the *Merchant Cap'n* driftin' on to it as fast as tide could take her. Wal, Mis' Tree had jest come upstairs, and I tumbled up behind her, cur'us as a monkey, same as all boys be. She looks at the land, and then up at Cap'n, that quick way she had, like a bird. 'What is it?' she says; and Cap'n says, 'Solomon Islands!'

"I hadn't no notion what that meant; I thought from the sound it might be some extry fine place, like the Bible, ye know, cedars of Lebanon, and Queens of Sheby, and like that; but Cap'n's voice had a queer sound to it, and I looked at him, and he was the color of her there!" he nodded toward the white image.

"Little Mis' Tree, she never turned a hair, though she knew what I didn't, that them islands was cannibal, the wust sort, and no white man had ever come off 'em

inside his own skin. She never turned a hair, only slid her mite of a hand into his, and said, quiet-like: 'We're both here, Ethan!' Cap'n give a kind of groan. 'I'd give my soul, Marshy,' he says, 'if you was safe to home!' She stood up straight — Jerusalem! I can see her now; 'twas like a flame risin', near as I can put it — and looks him in the face. 'I be to home!' she says; that was every word she said.

"Wal, word got round what land it was, — some of the crew had been that way before, — and I tell ye we was a pooty sick-lookin' crew. There warn't a breath o' wind, nor the shadow of a breath; and we kep' on a-driftin', till pooty soon we could see the shore plain, and black savages runnin' up and down, hollerin', and wavin' their arms. They see us, and were all ready for us; and pooty soon we could make out that they was pilin' up logs o' wood, makin'

fires — Seth, what in time made you start me in on this yarn? 'Tain't no kind o' thing for this gal to hear."

Annie Lizzie's eyes were like brown stars, her cheeks like Old Sir's carmine stock. "Oh, Mr. Rock!" she cried, "if Mis' Tree could bear it, I guess I can. Please go on! I *have* to hear the rest. And besides," she added, naïvely, "of course I know you wasn't all —"

She paused.

"No, we wasn't eat," said Salem Rock; "but I tell ye, little gal, we was as near it as a person is anyways desirous to come. We was that near, we see them critters grinnin' their white teeth at us, and heard their devils' screechin' and chatterin'. When it got to that, Cap'n called the crew aft, and told 'em, quiet and easy, how things was.

"'If the wind comes up within ten minutes,' he says, 'we are safe; if not, then

we've had our time in this world,' he says, 'and behoves us be ready for another. I see no reason, and Mis' Tree sees no reason, why we should go in that beastly fashion yonder,' he says, pointin' to the yellin' savages; 'and therefore I have give my orders, and before we touch that shore the doctor will serve an extry grog, that will take you through sleep to the presence of your Maker, and may He have mercy on your souls and mine!'

"'Amen!' says Mis' Tree, clear and crips; and I see she had a little bottle in her hand, holdin' it tight, and the other hand in Cap'n's. Jerusalem! she had grit!

"Wal, there was no words said. 'Twas a good crew, 'most all of 'em Quahaug men; your father was one of 'em, Seth."

Seth nodded gravely.

"But we got together forrard, and watched the shore, and Cap'n and Mis'

Tree stood aft and kep' their eye on the wind.

"That shore come nearer; it come nearer than was anyways comfortable. I warn't nothin' but a boy, and I can remember wonderin' whether the folks to home would ever know, and whether Cap'n would write the story and put it in a bottle, same as in books I'd read; and what'd become of the ship, and the little monkey I was tamin' for my sister. And then — then somebody sung out somethin', and I turned round; and there stood Cap'n Tree, with the tears runnin' over his face, and his arm up, p'intin' at the pennon on the masthead.

"'Bout ship!' he says; and that same moment come a puff o' wind from the shore; and then pooty soon another; and then the land-breeze set in good and steady.

"The helmsman put her about, and she come round with a dip and a sweep like a

dancin' lady, and went curtseyin' off over the waves — you never see a sight like that, little gal, nor never will see.

"'Let us give thanks to Almighty God!' says Cap'n Tree; and we give 'em, kneelin' on the deck."

Salem Rock drew a long breath, and took up his brush again.

"There!" he said. "You've had your story, Annie Lizzie. I dono as it's a very pooty one, but truth ain't allers pooty, I've noticed."

"Oh, it's a wonderful story, Mr. Rock!" cried little Annie Lizzie. "I thank you a thousand times for tellin' me. But ain't you goin' to tell the other one, too, about the lady? Please, Mr. Rock!"

"I guess not!" said Salem. "I guess I'm jaw-weary for this time."

"No, you ain't," said Seth Weaver. "Take more'n that to jaw-weary you, Sale,

with the practice you have," and he cast a cautious glance at the house. "Let the little gal hev the other story if she wants it. Fust thing we know you and me'll be to Kingdom Come, and who's to tell the stories then? The young folks ought to know 'em, too; this one special. Bile in, old hoss!"

Salem Rock drew another long breath. "You tell her about the spar yonder," he said, "while I third-co't these buttons; I've got to give my mind to 'em. I ain't the only man ever was to sea, Annie Lizzie: you sick him on to spin you that yarn, and then we'll see."

"Sho!" said Seth. "Ain't no story *to* that. All about it, Sale and me was both shipwrecked one time, — 'twas after Cap'n Tree was dead, — and us two and that spar was all that come ashore. Now go 'long, and let her hear about the *White Lady,* and

let the buttons go to Tinkham and see the sights."

Salem Rock cast a glance of affectionate comprehension at his companion. It was little less than heroic for Seth Weaver, the best story-teller in Qauhaug, thus to break and knot up his favorite yarn, the proper spinning of which took a good half-hour; but it was very rarely that Salem Rock could be brought to tell these two sea tales, and Seth was a good friend and a good listener.

So, when he repeated "Go 'long!" Salem nodded, and laid down his brush again.

"It's easy to see you're doin' this job by the day," he said. "I dono as Mis' Weight'll ever get them stairs done at this rate. Wal, if I've gotter, I've gotter, I s'pose. Up anchor and square away, hey? Wal, her there," he nodded toward the White Lady, "was figgerhead and likeness, fur as I know, to the *White Lady of Ave-*

nel, full-rigged ship, seven hundred and fifty tons, Ethan Tree master and owner. She was a clipper, the *White Lady* was, if ever such sailed the seas. Old Marm here is a fine-appearin' woman, fur as she goes," — he indicated by a wave of his hand the incompleteness which marred the perfect symmetry of the figure, — " but she ain't to be named within a week of the vessel herself. Mis' Tree named her out of a book she'd ben readin', — she was a great reader, — and had her all painted white, not a dark spot on her; I tell ye, she was a sightly vessel. So we sailed for Singapore, and I was second mate then, and prouder than ary peacock ever strutted, because I was young for the berth, ye see, and Cap'n promoted me for efficiency, so he said. Had a good voyage, and discharged our cargo, and loaded up again with coffee and raw silk, and off for home. Wal, sir, all went as it should the

fust few weeks, though I was none too well pleased with the make-up of the crew. That is to say, most of 'em was all right, or would have ben if they'd ben let alone; but two of 'em was strangers, picked up at Singapore, where two of our men died of jungle fever; and the fust mate broke his leg, ridin' a fool four-legged hoss, and had to be left in hospital; so we was both short-handed and left-handed, as you might say.

"Still we got on, and mebbe we might have come through all right, but then Cap'n took sick. I think he got some kind o' malaria p'ison ashore, and Mis' Tree thought so, too: anyway, he was terrible sick, and she nussed him, and run the ship, her and me together. She was allers good to me, ever sence she bought my mud pie when I was no more'n a baby; and we had good weather, and so things went from day to day after a fashion.

"But them two strangers, they was ugly, grumble-groan kind of fellers, lookin' for trouble. You mind me, Annie Lizzie; a man that's lookin' for trouble will find it, if he has to break the eggs from under a settin' hen to get at it. The minute these two fellers heard Cap'n was sick, they see their chance, and they commenced workin' on the men, talkin' of 'em round, and makin' 'em think they was abused. You mind this, too, little gal; you tell a man often enough that he's got a crick in his back, and he'll come to think it's broke, and go hollerin' to raise the roof for a plaster to mend it. Same way with our men: some of 'em, that is. There was others that was all right, and stayed all right, but yet, you know how 'tis: when there's two-three bad ones in a crew, it makes trouble all through, someways."

Seth nodded sympathetically. "Same as

a drop o' paint'll rile a hull pail o' water; or take it t'other way round, a spoonful o' water'll spile a hull can o' paint."

"That's so!" said Salem Rock, gravely. "Ile and water, good and evil; the Lord can mix 'em so they'll make a good wearin' color, but the hand of man cannot so do. Wal, come one day, Cap'n was so 'bad, Mis' Tree didn't leave his side all the mornin'; and I was busy with the log, and one thing and another, and, all about it, these fellers thought they see their chance to hatch up a mutiny. There was a big feller in the crew, Bob Moon his name was; a good seaman, but he warn't more'n half there in his upper story. He'd had a block drop on his head, and it kind o' mixed his *i*dees so they never got straight. He was sort o' gormin' and gappin' most of the time, and he'd go anyways any person had a mind to head him, and go hard, for he had the stren'th

of a bull and the mule-headedness of a — of a mule. Wal, these fellers — Faulkner and Higgins their names was — they got holt of Bob and two-three others, and give 'em to understand now was their time. Cap'n sick, and her tendin' of him, and me nothin' but second mate; and they allowed they'd ruther stop at the Azores and drop us three there, and go off with the vessel, tradin' on their own account. See? quite a pooty plot they hatched up; might ha' ben a story-book. But they got holt of the wrong stick when they tackled Ben Gray, the ship's carpenter. Ben was a straight stick of white pine timber as ever I see. He give 'em a smooth answer; said he'd think it over, and let 'em know, and he shouldn't be surprised if there was considerable in what they said, and like that; and then he come hotfoot and told me every word, and what should we do? I took him straight

down to the cabin, and called Mis' Tree to the door and told her. She looked us right through, as if she was countin' the j'ints in our back-bones. 'Are most of the men straight?' she says. So we told her how 'twas, most of 'em was all right at bottom, but yet they'd got sorter warpled through these fellers workin' on 'em, and we was feared there might be trouble. She studied a bit, still sarchin' us with them black eyes of her'n — gorry! seemed as though I could feel my soul rustlin' round uneasy inside me. Then she give us our orders, quick and quiet, and not too many of 'em; and we went off, and l'itered up on deck separate, and I sot down behind one of the bo'ts, nigh hand to the companion, and coiled rope. It was Bob Moon's watch on deck, and he was hunchin' round, mutterin' and growlin', and I could see he was workin' himself up to somethin'. 'Twarn't a gre't while before up

comes Ben Gray, and with him Faulkner, one of the two grumble-groans, talkin' mighty earnest. 'Here!' says Ben. 'Here's Bob Moon this minute. He's safe, ain't he?'

"'Bet yer life,' says Faulkner. 'He's all pie for us!' he says; 'ain't yer, Bob?' and Bob hunches himself and rubs his big hands, and allows he'll fix things to beat creation once he gits started.

"'You tell him, then,' says Ben, 'what you've jest told me, and mebbe we can run it off to-night,' he says.

"Moon was sittin' on the hatchway, with his back to the stairs, and Faulkner squats down beside him and commences dealin' out to him what he proposed; and Gray stood back a leetle mite, and I peeked round the eend of the bo't.

"Then — we never heerd a sound; but, all in a minute, there was Mis' Tree standin'

behind them two, close up. They was both men that had hair, Bob with a curl on him like a mattress, and t'other a kind o' thick tousle like a yeller dog's. That little woman never spoke, but she took those two by the hair — twisted her little hands in and got a good holt — and brought their two heads together with a crack — Jerusalem! 'twas like a pistol-shot! Every man on board jumped, and come runnin' to see what was up; but them two never stirred, jest sot there: their wits was clean jarred out of 'em. Then Mis' Tree spoke up, clear and crips; she never hollered, she no need, her voice carried like a trumpet.

"'Mr. Rock,' she says, 'put this man in irons, and George Higgins the same. Bob Moon, you come with me; I want you to nurse Cap'n for me. The rest go to your quarters.'

"She took holt of Bob's collar — he was

nearer seven foot than six, and had the brea'th of an ox — and give a little h'ist, and he come up like he was a rag dolly. 'Come along, Bob,' she says, 'Cap'n wants you,' and she marched him off like Mary had a little lamb, and he nussed Cap'n like his own mother from that hour. Further and moreover, he got his wits back likewise from that hour. Yes, sir, he did so. 'Peared as if one blow had shook his brains one way, and the next shook 'em back the other; I expect there wasn't enough of 'em to fill his head solid, so they wouldn't travel. And that man nussed Cap'n, and follered Mis' Tree like a span'el dog the rest of the voyage."

"But what become of those two mean men, Mr. Rock?" asked Annie Lizzie, who had followed the story with breathless interest. "Did they make any more trouble?"

"Not a mite!" said Salem Rock. "They was put in irons, and so remained till we come to the Azores, and there we left 'em, though not so agreeable to their wishes as the way they had planned. It seemed they belonged there, and was wanted for various causes; so we left 'em in the calaboose and come away. But for Cap'n's bein' so poorly, I'd never ask for a better voyage. The men was like pie, every man Jack of 'em, and if Mis' Tree wanted to wipe her shoes, there warn't ary one but would have ben proud to be her door-mat. Yes, sir; that was a great voyage — till it come to the eend."

He was silent; and Annie Lizzie, thinking the tale was over, made a motion to rise, but Seth checked her with a silent gesture.

"Go on, Sale," he said, quietly. "Finish up, now you're about it."

"There ain't but a little more," said the old sailor, speaking half to himself. "It

behoved to be a good voyage, for it was the last. Cap'n fit hard, and she fit for him, but 'twas not so to be. The p'ison, or whatever 'twas, had got too strong a holt on him; he couldn't shake it. But yet for awhile, when we was nearin' home, he seemed to gain up a mite, and would come up on deck, and set and see her take the observation, and pass the time of day with the boys. Looked like his shadow, he did, and white as his shirt under the tan; but his courage was good, and he was allers sayin' he'd get well so soon as he was to home.

"'Home, Marshy!' he'd say. 'We'll be there soon, little woman!'

"And she'd nod and smile, and say they would so, sure enough; and Bob Moon'd go off and cry behind a bo't. I punched his head good every time I co't him at it, fear they'd notice, but I don't think they did, they was wropped up in each other.

"Wal, at last and finally, sure enough we sighted Quahaug P'int. It was a fine day, I ric'llect, south by west, clear and warm; pretty a day as ever I see. Cap'n was on deck, and he was mighty weak that day. His voice was no more'n a whisper, but yet cheerful, you understand, and he had a word for every one that come by, and we all made out *to* come by, one errant or another. She was sittin' beside him, fannin' him, and talkin' away easy and pleasant, tellin' how that they'd be in soon now, and Lucy — that was Mis' Blyth, their daughter, Arthur's mother — would be comin' from the West to visit 'em, and all; and Cap'n listened, and seemed real pleased, and put in a word now and again.

"I was standin' close by, makin' believe tinker somethin', — I was allers nigh hand them days, case o' need, — when the lookout says, 'Quahaug P'int in sight, Cap'n!' and

we looked, and there it was, sure enough, and the sun goin' down behind it, and the water all the likeness of gold in between. Cap'n raised his head, and begun to talk sudden and quick. 'Marshy,' he says, 'I couldn't find a pineapple this mornin',' he says; 'but here's custard-apples and turtles' eggs; we'll manage to make out a breakfast,' he says. I looked up at him, and his eyes were bright as lamps, and his cheeks like fire. Mis' Tree put her hand on his arm, quiet like. 'That's just as good, Ethan,' she says. 'Them's beautiful,' she says; 'I was gettin' kinder tired of pineapples.' Then he goes on, sort o' like talkin' to himself. 'True blue, little Marshy!' he says. 'True blue, little wife! we'll get home yet; safe home, safe home!'

"Then all of a suddent he riz up to his feet, stood up every inch of him, — he was

a tall man, — and stands lookin' out forrard. 'Sail ho!' he says, 'sail ho! we'll see home again, home!' and he dropped back in her arms, and his sperit passed."

CHAPTER XII.

MISS WAX AT HOME

Miss Bethia Wax was at work one afternoon, bending over her little round table, busily plaiting a hair chain, when she heard her front door open. She looked up in some disturbance, for Phœbe, the little maid, was out, and there were few visitors, since Mrs. Stedman died, with whom she was on "run-in" terms: her disturbance was not lessened when the billowy form of Mrs. Malvina Weight appeared in the doorway.

"Good afternoon, Malvina," said Miss Wax, rather coldly. "I heard no knock; I trust you have not been kept waiting. My domestic is out."

"Yes, I see her go past the house," said the visitor, "and I thought I'd jest make a run-in. How are you feelin', Bethia? You're lookin' re'l poorly. I noticed it in meetin' last Sabbath. I said to myself, 'That woman is goin' jest the way all her fam'ly has, and she the last of 'em. As a friend *of* the fam'ly,' I said, 'it's my dooty to warn her'; and so I do."

Mrs. Weight sat down, and fanned herself with a small and rather dingy pocket-handkerchief.

"I am much obliged to you," said Miss Bethia. "I am in my usual health, Malvina, though I am never very robust. I was always delicate, as you may say, but yet I don't know but I have held my own with others of my age. Flesh isn't always a sign of health," she added, not without a touch of gentle malice.

"I expect I am aware of that!" cried

Mrs. Weight. "I expect there's few knows the frailness that comes with layin' on flesh. What I suffer nights is beyond the power of tongue to tell. But all the more it behoves me, as the widder of a sainted man and deacon of this parish, to do my dooty by others; and I ask you, Bethia Wax, if you are doctorin' any."

"I am not," said Miss Bethia, dryly.

"Well, you ought so to do," said Mrs. Weight, impressively. "It come to me right in meetin', when I ought to have ben listenin' to the sermon, — though the land knows I have hard work *to* listen sometimes, the sort o' talk Elder Bliss gives us: Gospel's well enough, but a person wants *some* doctrine, and it don't set good, any way, shape, or manner, for a man of his years to be the everlastin' time tellin' them as might be his mothers that they'd oughter do thus and so. I was leadin' in prayer when

Elder Bliss was a bottle-baby, at least he looks it if ever I see one. But what I started in to say was, it come over me all of a sudden that what you wanted was a bottle of my spring med'cine, and so I brought you one."

She produced a bottle from under her shawl, and set it on the table with a defiant air.

"I am much obliged to you, Malvina," Miss Wax began; but Mrs. Weight went on impressively.

"Now you want to *take* that med'cine, Bethia Wax! You want to take a gre't spoonful with your victuals, and in between your victuals. You take three bottles of that remedy, and you won't know yourself for the same woman. If you're a mind to pay me fifty cents for this bottle and sixty for the next two (that's thirty cents apiece, three spoonfuls for a cent, less

than half what you'd pay for any boughten stuff), you may, and, if not, it's all ekal to me; the Lord will provide. He feeds the ravens when they call, and I've never had no doubts of bein' one, far as *I'm* concerned."

Mrs. Weight here drew a long and deep breath, settled herself deeper in her chair, and took a fresh start.

"So now *that's* off my mind, and my dooty done, whether it's ordered that you should remain, or pass away same as your folks has done. Now, there's another thing I come to speak about. Be you goin' to march in this procession?"

Miss Wax colored painfully. "I have not decided, Malvina," she said. "I am considering the matter. Mr. Pindar Hollopeter has invited me to appear as — as Minerva —"

"There!" exclaimed Mrs. Weight. "I

knew it. I felt it in these bones!" She indicated the spaces which veiled her anatomy. "I felt certing to my inwards that this would end in pagan blasphemy, and so it has. Oh, that I should live to see jedgment on this village, as I've lived in, and my fathers before me, sence —"

"I do not understand you, Malvina," Miss Wax interrupted, with some warmth. "The Mr. Hollopeters are Christian men, I believe; at least, I know Homer is, and I've never heard anything to the contrary about Pindar."

"Have you ever heard anything about Pindar, anyway?" cried Mrs. Weight, her little eyes gleaming. "Do you, or doos any one in this village know, how or where that man has ben livin' these thirty years past? He never was one to hide his light under a booshel, if he had any to hide. Don't tell me, Bethia Wax! For thirty years Pindar

Hollopeter has ben livin' let them know how as he serves, and never a cent, nor so much as a breathin' word for the place that give him birth. But direckly he hears that Mis' Tree has passed away, and left her money to Homer, and Satan's own words and works in regards to changin' the name of this — "

Miss Bethia interrupted her again, promptly. "Malvina," she said, firmly, "I have told you before, and I tell you again, that no word disrespectful to Mrs. Tree shall be spoken in this house. There is no need of bringing her into this matter at all; but I should like to know why you call the Festival Procession pagan."

"And ain't it pagan?" cried Mrs. Weight, leaning forward, her hands on her knees. "Ain't you jest told me with your own lips, Bethia Wax, that he asked you, a church-member in reg'lar standin', to strut

and stomp as a heathen goddess, in heathen clo'es? Ain't that enough? Hasn't he got all the girls in this village takin' their Mas' best sheets and table-cloths and sewin' of 'em up to make toonics for muses and graces and all sich pagan trollops? Ain't that enough? Do you think sheets is fit and suitable clo'es for church-members? or table-cloths? And 'tain't as if he hadn't ben shown a better path. 'Pindar,' I said, when he come to see about Annie Lizzie, 'you get up an Old Folks' Concert,' I says, 'and I'll be the Goddess of Liberty for ye,' I says. I had that red, white, and blue buntin', you know, that we hired for the Centennial. Some of it was damaged, and the man wouldn't take it back, and it's ben in my attic ever sence; and I thought 'twould be a good way to use it up, and help him out at the same time. Why, Bethia, that man looked at me — why, I believe he's ravin'

distracted; he poured out a string o' stuff that hadn't no sense or meanin' in it; and then said, 'Shakespeare,' as if that made it any better. Deacon never would have Shakespeare's works in the house; he said they was real vulgar, and that was enough for me. So he see I was real indignant, and he blinked his eyes and spoke up and said I might be a Roman matron if I was a mind to. But I says, 'No, sir!' I says. 'I am an American lady, and the widder of a sainted man, and *I* am not goin' travellin' and traipsin' in heathen and publican clo'es, whatever others may do!' and so I come away, and left him flappin' there on the doorsteps. He's ravin' crazy, Pindar Hollopeter is; he'd oughter be shut up. And I told Annie Lizzie she shouldn't have anything to do with it in any way, shape, or manner. She's ben bawlin' all day about it, but I tell her I didn't take her out of the street to

have her rigged out with wings. If she'd think of her end, I tell her, and how she can airn a pair to walk the golden streets with, it would set *her* better. Well, I must be goin', Bethia; I only run in jest for a minute. Now I hope you'll take that med'cine reg'lar, and benefit by it. I couldn't answer to Deacon when I meet him in glory if I hadn't done my dooty to them as is neighbors to me, specially when they look as gashly as you do, Bethia; but I'm in hopes we've taken it in time, and you may be spared. *Good* day!"

The visitor gone, Miss Wax heaved a sigh of relief, and tried to settle to her work again; but it would not do. Her mind had been disturbed, and, as she often said, her profession required calm. The hand must be steady, the nerves tranquil, or the delicate strands would twist and knot; and now her long, slim fingers were trembling, and the

silken threads danced before her eyes. "I must give it up for to-day," said Miss Bethia, sadly; and she put away the little table, and took out a clean silk duster.

A parlor must be dusted twice in the day, according to Miss Wax's theory: once in the morning, to remove the night's accumulation of dust, and again toward evening, to take up such particles of the evil thing as had settled during the day on chair or table, book or ornament. The morning task was an anxious one, and apt to be complicated by fears of the coffee's boiling over; but the afternoon dusting was one of the good lady's pleasures, and she took her time over it. She loved to linger over the glass cases, polishing them, admiring the treasures they protected, and recalling the circumstances of their making. It was pleasant to accompany her, as one was sometimes permitted to do, on one of these friendly rounds.

"These pond-lilies," she would say, "were a wedding present to my cousin Cilissa Vinton, deceased. They were admired by some; Cilissa thought they were real, and wished to wear them in her hair. After her lamented death (of spasms), the family returned them to me as a memento. That spray of roses is made of feathers, the breast-feathers of the domestic goose. I never allowed them to be plucked from the living bird, my dear! I used to wear them in my hair; some thought the contrast pretty." And Miss Bethia would sigh gently, and glance at the long mirror, which reflected her tall and angular gentility.

But this afternoon the good lady's thoughts were not reminiscent. As she stood before the rosewood "what-not," lifting each article, wiping it, and replacing it with delicate nicety (I can see them all: the two mandarins, the china baby in the bath-tub, —

you could take him out! the whole thing would go into a walnut-shell, — the pink-and-gold Dresden shepherd and shepherdess, the Chinese puzzles, and all the other quaint pleasantnesses), it was of to-day rather than yesterday that Miss Bethia was thinking. Should she — *could* she — walk in a public procession attired as Minerva? She put aside with an inward shudder Mrs. Weight's characterization of the possible performance. She, Bethia Wax, could not "strut and stomp" if she tried. Her walk was graceful, as she was well aware; in her youth she had been said to glide.

> "As a swan o'er the water,
> Quahaug's fairy daughter
> In majesty maiden doth glide;
> May the day Wax and wane
> When the sighs of her swain
> May waft her to bliss as a bride!"

Homer Hollopeter had written that in her album at a time when she and Pindar were

— oh, no! not engaged, certainly not; only very good friends. Homer, she was aware, had regarded her as a sister, had wished — but she never laid it up against Mary; no, indeed! Who could wonder at any one's falling in love with Mary?

And now, after all the years, Pindar had come back; still an elegant man, Miss Wax thought, though nervous, to be sure, sadly nervous. "But perhaps it is his emotions," she said. "No doubt he feels it, coming back after thirty years, and all so changed." And he had pressed her hand, and murmured, "Ye gods!" which was almost profane, Miss Bethia feared, — yet not quite, she hoped; and had asked her to represent Minerva, goddess of wisdom, in the Festival Procession. He was coming this very evening for her answer; what should it be?

Miss Bethia glanced again at the long mirror. The angular, yet not ungraceful,

figure, the long, oval face with its delicate features and arched eyebrows, the glossy bands of hair, still jet-black, — the whole reflection was familiar, friendly, not — Miss Wax modestly hoped — not wholly unpleasing. She tried to imagine the figure clad in flowing draperies; there was a rose-colored slip under the spare room spread; sateen always draped prettily; pink was her color, and she could not somehow feel that sheets would be quite — quite what she would wish to be seen in. And — on her head, now! Would a helmet be necessary? There was not such an article in the village, but she presumed with silver paper — and yet, a wreath would be so much more becoming; the feather-work roses, for example! She took them from under their round glass case, and laid them against her hair, then put them back with a sigh. The contrast certainly used to be thought becoming,

but somehow — and after all was it suitable? What would Phœbe and Vesta Blyth — what would Mrs. Tree have said?

With the thought, a vision rose before Miss Wax's eyes: a little figure seated in a high-backed chair, leaning on an ebony crutch-stick; black eyes gleaming with merriment, lips curving in a shrewd yet kindly smile —

Miss Wax glanced at the trophy of silver coffee-spoons which still adorned the mantelpiece; sighed again, and turned away from the glass. "After all," murmured dear Miss Bethia, and this time she smiled, though it was a rather wan smile; "after all, Minerva was the goddess of wisdom!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SORROWS OF MR. PINDAR

It must not be supposed that Mr. Pindar Hollopeter's path was altogether set with roses at this time; on the contrary, many a thorn and bramble arrested his progress, and the poor gentleman's enthusiasm received many a prickly wound. He had been able to wave Mrs. Weight away with a lofty, "Off, woman, off! this hour is mine!" but there were others who could not be so dismissed. Mrs. Ware had gently but firmly declined to lead the band of Roman Matrons; and Salem Rock, when approached in regard to leading the Village Elders, had expressed his mind with massive finality.

"Pindar," he said, "I don't exactly know what you mean by robes, but my gen'al idee of 'em is somethin' white and flappin'. Now I wore a christenin' robe when I was a baby, and I expect to wear a burial robe when I'm laid out; but, betwixt them two, I expect co't and pants will have to do me. Jest as much obleeged to you," he added, kindly, seeing Mr. Pindar's look of disappointment.

Again, Mr. Pindar was amazed and distressed by the lack of youth and beauty in the village. It did seem unfortunate that Sophy Willow and the three pretty Benton girls were away, and that Villa Nudd's mother was ill and could not spare her. Beautiful Lily Jaquith could not leave her new baby, and Vesta Strong wrote that she should have been delighted to be Juno, but *all* the children had just come down with chicken-pox. On the other hand, Mr. Pindar found to his dismay that the line between

youth and middle age was less closely drawn in the village than in the theatres of the metropolis. That very morning, Miss Luella Slocum had come simpering up to him in the street, and had given him to understand that she would have no objection to taking the part of Psyche "to accommodate," as she heard that Annie Lizzie Weight was not to be allowed to walk in the Procession. Now Miss Luella would never see forty-five again, and her eyes, as has already been intimated, took widely divergent views of things in general; but she had always had a "theatrical turn," she informed Mr. Pindar, and had taken the part of Mrs. Jarley when they had the Wax Works.

"And I do love to accommodate!" said Miss Luella, blandly. "I know what it is to have folks set back and keep out of things, Mr. Hollopeter. I don't know but Mis' Weight is right about Annie Lizzie; she's

too young to be dressin' up and comin' forward in public, and besides, she's had no experience, as you may say. You couldn't expect her to have the *air,* like a person that's had experience. That's what I always say; you have to have the air, or you can't do it as it should be done. Don't say a word, Mr. Hollopeter; I shall be real pleased to help out, and I have a flowered Cretan that I'd like to have you call and see if 'twill do."

"I wonder if he *is* a little wantin'," said Miss Luella, in telling Miss Eliza Goby of the incident afterward. "He didn't hardly say a word, only give a kind of groan, and flapped his cloak, and begun walkin' off backwards in the most sing'lar way. I'm goin' to take this Cretan in to Prudence this afternoon, and see if she can make it over; it's Princess shape, and that's always stylish, I think; and I thought put on pink silk reveres would kind of liven it up: Psyche

wants to look kind of youthful, I presume. The sleeves are a mite snug, but I don't know as that matters; I sha'n't have to raise my arms. What are you goin' to wear, Eliza?"

"White muslin," said Miss Eliza Goby, "and a blue sash, or green, I haven't decided which; green is my color, but I have that blue Roman sash, you know. I think Pindar *is* queer, Luella. One thing, he doosn't seem to have hardly any knowledge about this village; I don't know as he takes the paper even. Why, he thought I was married, and wanted I should walk with the married ladies; matrons, he called 'em; the *idea*! I told him I'd never ben married, and didn't hardly know as I should; anyways, I warn't thinking of it at present, and I'd go with the rest of the girls."

"And what did he say?" asked Miss Slocum.

"I don't believe that man is well," said Miss Goby, gravely. "He made pretty much the same answer as he did you, sort of groaned and flapped. I think he had a pain in — in his digestion, and didn't like to speak of it. He's a perfect gentleman, if he is a mite flighty. That man had ought to have him a home, and some one to look after him, that's the fact; him and Homer, too."

"That's so!" said Miss Slocum.

But the unkindest cut of all was administered by the hand of Miss Prudence Pardon. It was Mrs. Bliss who advised him to take counsel with Miss Prudence in regard to costumes in general, and the little lady was smitten with remorse afterward for having done so.

"It was base of me, John, I know," she said; "but I simply *could* not tell him myself; he was so hopeful and confiding,

and so — so pitiful, somehow, John. I don't think he is a bit more crazy than other people, — I believe I am a little cracked myself on some subjects, and I *know* you are, — only his craziness is in a different line, that we know nothing about. And when he blinks at me with his nice brown doggy eyes, and flaps his little bat-cloak, and says, 'The Dramatic Moment, Mrs. Bliss!' I want to be a Roman Matron, and a Village Elder, and everything else, just to please him. I would, too, if you would let me, John. I don't believe that man had enough to eat before he came here; he's a perfect skeleton."

"I do not precisely see the connection, Marietta, my dear," said the Reverend John, mildly.

"You never do, dear!" replied his wife. "Talk of bats! but — well, so I just told him that I should have *loved* to if I hadn't

been a minister's wife, but that you were a cruel tyrant and wouldn't let me; and then I advised him to go to Miss Prudence, because she would know all about tunics and togas and everything else. I knew, you see, that she was all ready to give him a piece of her mind, because she gave me just a scrap the other day, when I was trying on my blue dimity. It's going to be perfectly sweet, John. Oh, I do hope she will not hurt his poor dear funny feelings *too* much: she can be frightfully severe."

But even while Mrs. Bliss was speaking, Miss Prudence Pardon, Rhadamanthus in a black alpaca apron, was laying down the law to Mr. Pindar, and emphasizing her points with a stiffly extended pair of shears. Miss Prudence had sat on the same bench at school with the Hollopeter boys, and saw no reason for mincing matters.

"Pindar," she said, "if you hadn't have

come to me, I should have held my peace; but seeing as you have come, and asked my opinion, you shall have it, without fear or favor. I think this whole thing is ridic'-lous nonsense; and I think if you go on with it as you've begun, you will prove your-self, if I must use such an expression, what I call a gonoph."

Mr. Pindar shrank for an instant before the epithet, but gathered himself together with a protesting wave.

"Madam!" he cried, "you fail to com-prehend —"

"Excuse *me!*" said Miss Prudence, wav-ing the shears in return. "I expect if there's any one in this village as ought to compre-hend, it's me, with all I've ben through this week. Do you see that pile of truck?" She pointed stiffly with the shears at a mass of drapery piled high on the haircloth sofa. "There's thirty whole dresses there, let alone

odd skirts and polonays. There's full sleeves and snug sleeves, and gored skirts and full skirts, and ruffles and box-plaits, and more styles than ever you heard of in your life, and every material from more antique to sarsnet cambric. I am expected to make all them over into toonics and togas, and the hens only know what other foolery; and I tell you, Pindar, it can't be done, nor I ain't going to try to do it."

She paused for a moment, for Mr. Pindar was waving his arms and flapping his cloak in fervid assent.

"My dear madam," he cried; "my dear Prudence, if I may take the liberty of an old schoolmate, I agree with you fully, entirely. I have endeavored to point out to the ladies with whom I have conversed, that a harmony of costume is absolutely imperative; that flowing drapery — the classic, Prudence, the classic! — is what the occa-

sion demands. A glance at statuary will readily convince you — "

Miss Prudence pointed the shears rigidly. "Pindar Hollopeter," she said, "I have seen considerable statuary in the course of my life, both Parian and wax, and I say this to you: I never see a statue yet with clothes that I would say fitted, — where there was any!" she added, grimly, and compressed her lips. "As to hanging sheets and the like of that on human beings, as if they was clo'es-horses," she went on, "it's no part of the trade I was brought up to, and I've no idee of beginning at my time of life, and so I tell you. Now my advice to you is this: give up all this foolishness of a procession, and have a reception at the house, or the *mu*seum, or whatever it is to be called from now on. Have it a pink tea, if you like, and I'll get up some real tasty dresses for the girls, the few there is, and

the ladies can receive. That'll part the cats from the kittens, and I dunno's there's anything else will. The idea of 'Lize Goby in white muslin! She'd look like lobster and white of egg, and so I told her.

"The fact is, Pindar," Miss Prudence went on, more gently, laying down the shears for an instant, "you and Homer was both brought up real peculiar, and you're feeling it now. I don't mean to set in jedgment on your Ma, far from it; but look at the way it has worked out. Homer is a poet; well, luckily for him, he got into the post-office, where it didn't do a mite of harm. Homer is well liked and respected by all in this village," she added, benevolently, "and there was no one but rejoiced at his being left well off. But you, Pindar, took to the Drayma. Well, I've nothing to say against the Drayma, either, because I've had no experience of it, nor wished to have, only

this: it never had any holt in this village, and when you try to bring it here, you make a big mistake. What is it, P'nel'pe?"

Miss Penny, kindest soul in the village where so many are kind, had been hovering uneasily about the door during this interview. She respected Sister Prudence's judgment highly, and her own cheerful common sense forced her to agree with it in this instance; and yet her heart ached to see Mr. Pindar — such an elegant man! — sitting forlorn and dejected, with drooping head and wings, he who had entered with so jaunty a stride, Importance throned on his brow and the Dramatic Moment flapping in his cloak. She did wish Sister Prudence had not been quite so severe.

But now Miss Penny looked in, with anxious eyes and heightened color. "Excuse *me*," she said. "I see some of the ladies comin', Sister, and I thought likely they

was comin' to try on. I didn't know but Mr. Hollopeter would wish — " She paused to listen, and then hurried back, for already the little shop was full of voices.

" Is Prudence in, Penny? Has she got that polonay ready to try on, think? "

" Penny, I want to know if you've got any linin's to match this pink cheese-cloth; it don't hardly show over white."

" Penny, I found this up attic, and I've come to show it to Prudence. See here! don't you think it'll make an elegant toonic, take and piecen it out with a Spanish flounce, and cut off this postilion? Shall I go — "

Mr. Pindar sprang to his feet and looked wildly about him. Miss Prudence spoke no word, but, raising the shears, pointed toward the red-curtained glass door that opened into the little back garden.

" — right in? " The door from the shop opened, and admitted Mrs. Pottle, her mas-

sive arms filled with polka-dotted purple merino.

"How are you, Prudence?" said Mrs. Pottle. "You look feverish."

"I'm as well as common, thank you," said Miss Prudence, grimly. "Won't you be seated?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DRAMATIC MOMENT

Mr. Pindar, as has already been said, was to call on Miss Wax that evening for her answer; but Mr. Homer was before him, for this was Friday evening, which the little gentleman invariably spent with his life-long friend. Punctually at a quarter before eight he appeared, and found Miss Wax ready for him, sitting under the portrait, with her elbow resting on the little table. Her silk dress, of the kind called *chiné,* displayed bunches of apple-blossoms on a pale purple ground; she wore a scarf of rose-colored crape, and a profusion of hair jewelry. Mr. Homer, as he advanced to greet

her, made his usual mental comment that she was an elegant female, and pressed her hand cordially; Miss Bethia returned the pressure, and inquired anxiously for his health. "I trust you are feeling better, Homer," she said, kindly; "all this excitement is very disturbing to you, I am sure. But it will soon be over now."

Mr. Homer sighed, as he took his accustomed seat. "Either it or I must soon be over, Miss Bethia," he said, mournfully. "I feel that I cannot much longer cope with — a — the present circumstances. I am aware that I should have more fortitude; more — a — longanimity; but — as the lamented Keats has it, 'Misery most drowningly doth sing in my lone ear.' The cup of joy, Miss Bethia, has become a poisoned chalice. The firmament outblackens Erebus; the brooks utter a gorgon voice. Many phrases which I have formerly considered

as mere poetical ebullitions, — a — wafts of the Wings of Poesy, if I may so express myself, — now seem to me the fit expression, — a — realization, — a — I may say concretion, — of my present state of mind. I thought I appreciated the great Keats before, but — " He waved his hands and shook his head in speechless emotion.

" Can you not dismiss the subject from your mind for a time, Homer? " asked Miss Bethia, soothingly. " Your studies have always sustained you, and have been of great benefit, I am sure, to your friends as well as yourself. Have you written any more of the Epic, the ' Death of Heliogabalus ' ? I was in hopes you might have another scene to read to me this evening."

Mr. Homer shook his head. " I have not touched the Epic," he said, " since — since the events which have recently concatenated, if I may so express myself. I sometimes

think that I shall never touch it again, Miss Bethia."

"Oh, don't say that, Homer!" Miss Wax protested; but the little gentleman went on, with an agitated wave.

"I sometimes feel as if the Muse had deserted me; had — a — ceased to gild with her smile the — shall I say the peaks of my fancy? I have endeavored to woo her back. My brother Pindar is most anxious that I should write an — an ode — for this celebration which he is planning; but the numbers in which I have been in the habit of lisping, and which — I may say to you, my valued friend — were wont in happier days to flow, — to — a — meander, — to — a — babble o'er Pirene's sands, with ease and — and alacrity, now hesitate; — a — reluctate; — a — refuse the meed of melody which — which the occasion demands. My

brother Pindar, — you have seen him, Miss Bethia?"

"Oh, yes!" said Miss Wax, softly. "He was here yesterday. He asked — he was so good as to invite me to appear in the Festival Procession as — as Minerva."

Mr. Homer looked up eagerly. "And you replied?" he asked.

"I asked for time to consider," said Miss Wax, looking down. "I need not say to you, Homer, that it is not easy to refuse Pindar's first request, after so many years of absence;" she sighed gently; "but — but reflection has convinced me that it would not be altogether — shall I say suitable? I have never appeared in public, Homer, and I hardly feel — "

She paused, for Mr. Homer was waving his hands and opening and shutting his mouth in great agitation.

"Precisely so!" he cried. "Oh, very

much so indeed, my dear friend. It is an unspeakable consolation to find that you share my sentiments on this subject. May I, Miss Bethia, — with friendship's key, — unlock, so to speak, the counsels of my — my bleeding breast? We are old friends: we twa — if I may quote Burns in this connection — ha' paidl't i' the burn, — I speak metaphorically, my dear lady, as I need not assure you, — frae mornin' sun till dine; the poets refuse occasionally the bonds of grammar, and both rhyme and metre require the verb in this instance, as you will readily perceive, even though — "

Mr. Homer waved the subject to its conclusion, and hurried on: "You have also known Pindar from childhood, and have always felt — may I not say kindly, toward the wayward but high-souled lad?"

"Oh, yes!" murmured Miss Bethia, softly, with another gentle sigh.

"This being so," Mr. Homer went on, "I may say to you without hesitation that this whole matter of the celebration is a — is a nightmare to me! I have led a secluded life, Bethia, as befits a votary of the Muse. Blest with a limited but sufficient number of congenial friends, principally ladies, — though William Jaquith and Thomas Candy have been as sons to me of late, as sons, — I have kept, Miss Bethia, the noiseless tenor of my way, — the expression is Gray's, as you are well aware, and is commonly misquoted, *even* tenor being the customary, though wholly incorrect version; — a — where was I? Oh, yes, as I was about to say, I have kept the noiseless tenor of my way, in peace and pleasantness, hitherto.

"'For indeed,' as the lamented Keats observes in an early poem which is too little known:

> " 'For indeed, 'tis a sweet and peculiar pleasure,
> (And blissful is he who such happiness finds,)
> To possess but a span of the hour of leisure
> In elegant, pure, and aerial minds.'

That peculiar pleasure, Miss Bethia, has been mine up to the present time. My brother Pindar's course has been far different. At an early age, as you are aware, he sought the maddening throng; the — a — busy hum; the — a — in short, the roaring mart. I understand that much of his time has been devoted to music, and the remainder to histrionic art. He is permanently employed, as I understand, at a — a metropolitan place of amusement, where he occasionally takes part in Shakespearian representations (he has played the Ghost in 'Hamlet,' he tells me), and at other times performs upon the — in short, the kettledrums. You will readily perceive, my dear friend, that such a life conduces to the development of

ideas which are discrepant; — a — divergent from, — a — devoid of commensurability with, the *genius loci,* the spirit which hovers, or has hitherto hovered, over Elm— I would say Quahaug. Miss Bethia, we are not a dramatic community. With the exception of Mrs. Jarley's Wax Works, some thirty years ago, and an Old Folks' Concert at a somewhat later period, I am unable to recall any occurrence of a — of a histrionic nature in our — shall I say midst? And now, — Miss Bethia, I love my brother tenderly, and am anxious, deeply anxious, to respond to the feeling, the — a — propendency, the — kindling of affection's torch, which has led him to seek his early home. I also respect, — a — revere, — a — entertain the loftiest sentiments in regard to the Muse; but when I am asked to appear in public, clad in draperies which — in short, of domestic origin," — he waved fur-

ther detail delicately away, — "and crowned with bays, I — Miss Bethia, I assure you my spirit faints within me. Nor can I feel that the proposed demonstration would in any way have commended itself to my cousin Marcia. It is borne in upon me — strenuously, I may say — that, if my cousin Marcia were present at this time in the — a — fleshly tabernacle, she would receive this whole matter in a spirit of — levity; of — a — derision; of — a — contumely. Am I wrong in this supposition, Miss Bethia?"

"I feel positive that you are right, Homer!" said Miss Wax. "I speak with conviction. In fact, it was the thought of — of Her we honor," — she glanced at the trophy with an introductory wave, — "that brought me to a decision on the point. I do feel for you, Homer, and share with you the distress of having to — to deny Pindar

anything he desires. He will be here soon, and perhaps if we speak to him gently on the subject, he may see it in the light in which it presents itself to us. Probably this side has not been suggested to him." (Has it not? Oh, Miss Prudence! Miss Prudence!) "I think that if we compose our thoughts to a greater degree of calm, we may have more effect. A little music, Homer?"

Mr. Homer put his hand to his head with a sigh. "Miss Bethia," he said, "a little music would be balm to the thirsty soul; — a — wings to the rainbow-hued spirit; — a — oil which runs down the —" He waved the rest of the simile away. "I thank you, my elegant and valued friend. May I conduct you to the instrument?"

It was a pleasant sight to see Mr. Homer conducting Miss Bethia Wax to the instrument. After a profound bow (his feet in the first position in dancing), he held out

his hand; she laid the tips of her long fingers delicately in it, and, thus supported, glided across the room; a courtesy of thanks, a bow of acknowledgment, and she sank gracefully on the music-stool, while Mr. Homer returned to his favorite chair, drew a long breath, and sank back with folded hands and closed eyes.

Miss Wax's instrument was one of Mr. Homer's chief sources of inspiration, and I must give it a word of description, for perhaps there never was another precisely like it. Tommy Candy called it a barrel-organ, and indeed it was not wholly unlike an idealized barrel of polished rosewood, standing erect on four slender legs. The front was decorated with flutings of red silk; the wood was inlaid with flowers and arabesques in mother-of-pearl. Beneath the silk flutings appeared an ivory handle, and it was by turning this handle that Miss

Bethia "performed." "Cecilia's Bouquet" was the name inscribed on the front in flourishing gilt letters; and Miss Bethia had often been told that, when playing on the instrument, she reminded her hearers of the saint of that name. It was perhaps on this account that she was in the habit of assuming a rapt expression at such times, her head thrown back, her eyes raised to the level of the cornice. Thus seated and performing, Miss Bethia was truly a pleasant sight; and the melodies that came faltering out from the old music-box (for really it was nothing else!) were as pensive, mild, and innocent as the good lady herself. "The Maiden's Prayer," "The Sorrowful Shepherd," "Cynthia's Roundelay," and "The Princess Charlotte's Favorite;" these were among them, I remember, but there were twelve airs, and it took quite half an hour to play them all through.

On this occasion, long before the half-hour was over, Mr. Homer's brow had cleared, and his face grown as placid as Miss Bethia's own. "The Princess Charlotte's Favorite" was also his (a most melancholy air I always thought it, as if the poor princess had foreseen her early death, and bewailed it, a Jephthah's Daughter in hoop and powder), and he followed it with pensive pleasure, bowing his head and waving his hands in time to the music, and occasionally joining in the melody with a thin but sweet falsetto. "Ta-ta, ta-tee, ta-ta, ta-tum!" warbled Mr. Homer, and Miss Bethia's gentle heart rejoiced to hear him.

The two friends were so absorbed that they did not hear the door-bell, — indeed, it rang in the kitchen, and was a subdued tinkle at that, — nor Peggy's steps as she went to answer the call; and it was only when the "Princess Charlotte's Favorite"

had faltered to its dismal conclusion that Mr. Homer, chancing to raise his eyes, saw his brother standing in the doorway. The vision was a disconcerting one. Mr. Pindar stood with his arms folded in his little cloak, his head bent forward, peering up through his eyebrows with a keen and suspicious look. Thus he stood for an instant; but, on meeting his brother's eyes, he flung up both arms as if in invocation, — whether of blessing or malediction was not clear to Mr. Homer's perturbed gaze, — the cloak fluttered in batlike sweeps, and he was gone.

Mr. Homer sprang to his feet with an exclamation of dismay; and Miss Bethia, whose back had been turned to the door, rose also in wonder and distress. "What is the matter, Homer?" she asked. "You appear disturbed. Is — is any one there?" she added, seeing his look still fixed on the empty doorway.

"It was my brother!" replied Mr. Homer. "It was Pindar. He was apparently — moved; — a — agitated; — a — under stress of emotion. I fear he is ill, Miss Bethia; I must hasten after him."

"Pindar ill!" cried Miss Bethia. "Oh, Homer, bring him back, will you not? bring him back, and let me give him some of my Raspberry Restorative! Do hasten!"

Mr. Homer promised to return if it were possible, and hurried away, leaving his hostess wringing her hands and uttering plaintive murmurs. He hastened along the quiet street. The moon was up, and he could see a figure fluttering on ahead of him, with waving cloak and hasty, disordered steps.

"Pindar!" cried Mr. Homer. "My dear brother! wait for me, I implore you. It is I, Homer; I entreat you to pause!"

The figure wavered, halted; finally turned round, and stood with folded arms till Mr.

Homer hurried up, anxious and breathless.

"Are you ill, Pindar?" cried the little gentleman. "Some sudden seizure, my dear brother? I am truly distressed: let me support you!"

But Mr. Pindar waved him aside with a lofty gesture. "I require no support, Brother!" he said. "My corporal envelope is robust, I am obliged to you."

"Then why — why this sudden appearance and disappearance?" asked Mr. Homer, bewildered. "Miss Wax was expecting you; we were both expecting you, sir!"

"Were you?" said Mr. Pindar, bitterly. "I should hardly have thought it. I judged that I intruded, sir. It appeared to me that tender passages were in progress. I inferred that the advent of the Wanderer was unwelcome, sir, unwelcome."

Mr. Homer attempted to speak, but Mr.

Pindar waved him off, and hurried on, a real feeling struggling through the pompous structure of his sentences. "It would appear that I was in error, sir, when I requested you to compose an ode. I should have demanded an epithalamium; flute and clarionet, sir:

> "Tweedle, tweedle, toodle tum,
> Clash the cymbal, bang the drum!
> Cupid and his antic choir
> Sing for Homer and Bethia!

But you might have told me, Homer; you might have told me, sir!"

Mr. Homer Hollopeter blushed very red all over; if it is discreet even to allude to Mr. Homer's toes, I am quite sure that even they must have grown rosy. He looked gravely at his brother, who was waving his cloak in great excitement.

"My dear brother," he said, slowly, "it

— I — I fail to find words in which to express the — the — *enormousness* of your misconception. I regard Miss Wax, sir, as a sister, an esteemed and valued sister."

At the place where Mr. Homer had overtaken his brother, stood a watering-trough, a hollowed section of a huge oak-tree, through which ran a tiny crystal stream. The companion oak, still vigorous, overshadowed the trough, making a pleasant circle of shade, and around this oak ran a rustic seat. It was a favorite gathering-place of the village boys, but now the boys were in bed, and all was still save for the gurgle of the little rill as it babbled along the trough.

To Mr. Homer's utter amazement and discomfiture, Mr. Pindar now flung himself down upon this seat, and, pulling out a large blue cotton handkerchief, buried his face in it and burst into tears.

"Nobody is glad to see me!" cried Mr. Pindar, sobbing violently. "Everybody thinks I am mad. Prudence Pardon called me a — a gonoph, and refused to make tunics for the Village Elders. A horrible fat woman — rightly named Weight — *horresco referens!* — wished to be Goddess of Liberty, and, when I shrank appalled, she robbed me of the pretty child who should have been my Psyche. I am — unappreciated, sir. I am mocked at and derided. The little dogs and all, Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart — I returned to benefit my native heath: to cause — blossoms of histrionic art to spring up in the — arid pathways — oyster shells!" — he indicated by a wave the white and glittering paths which led to one and another silent house, and which are indeed the pride of the village. "I have piped to everybody, and nobody will dance, except — hideous persons who squint. I came

for comfort and sympathy to Bethia Wax, the playmate of my early days; I found — " He waved his arms with a gesture of despair. " And I am so tired of playing the kettle-drum! " said the poor gentleman; and he wept afresh.

Mr. Homer sat down by his brother's side, and laid his hand on his shoulder. " Don't cry! " he said. " Don't cry, Pindy! Mother wouldn't like to have you cry."

His voice faltered on the long-unspoken diminutive; but, at the sound of it, Mr. Pindar, still holding the handkerchief to his eyes with his right hand, held out his left; Mr. Homer grasped it, and the two sat silent, hand in hand, while the little stream trickled cheerfully along, and the black leaf-shadows flickered on the white road.

Mr. Homer opened and shut his mouth several times, and patted his brother's hand,

before he spoke again. At length he said, very gently:

"My dear boy, my dear fellow, you are unnerved. Compose yourself, compose yourself! I also have been sadly unnerved, Pindy. An hour ago I could have mingled my tears with yours freely, sir, freely. But music hath charms, as you are aware, to soothe the — Savagery is far from my breast at the present time, sir, but the quotation is too familiar to require elucidation. Our friend Miss Wax has been performing upon the instrument, and an hour spent in her society, when thus employed, is invariably soothing to the wounded spirit. I wish, my dear brother, that you had come earlier in the evening."

Mr. Pindar groaned, and dried his eyes, but made no reply. Mr. Homer, pausing, looked carefully about him, as if struck by a sudden thought.

"Pindar," he said, in an altered tone, "do you know where we are sitting? Look about you!"

Mr. Pindar looked around, then up at the tree which bent friendly over them. "It is the oak-seat!" he exclaimed. "The oak-seat and the watering-trough. Muffled drums! Enter Homeless Wanderer, weeping."

"Do you remember the day when Silas Candy ducked Ephraim Weight?" said Mr. Homer, disregarding the last remark. "We were sitting here, Pindar, and we did not interfere. I have sometimes reflected that it was a — an error, sir; a — a faltering in the way; a — a dereliction from the — a — star-y-pointing path; but we were young, sir, and Ephraim was — shall I say unattractive? But — Pindy, when Silas came along — I remember it as if it were yesterday — I had just been cutting some initials

in the tree. Upon my word, they are here still!" With a trembling finger he pointed out some half-obliterated letters. "B. H., sir; do you see them? Bethia Hollopeter!"

Mr. Pindar nodded gloomily, and, putting away the blue handkerchief, crossed his arms on his breast. "I see them, sir," he said. "Why turn the dagger in the wound? I see them!"

"What was my thought, Brother," Mr. Homer went on, growing more and more animated, "when I made those letters; when I — a — wounded the oaken breast which — which — not precisely nourished, but certainly cheered and comforted me? Brother, I fancied Bethia as your bride. Stay! hear me!" as Mr. Pindar made a hasty gesture of dissent. "I knew later that — that your affections, like my own, were placed elsewhere; but — but Fate, sir, planted an arrow, of a highly barbed description, in our

twin breasts. No more of that. Miss Bethia Wax, sir, has been the friend, the elegant and valued friend, of my entire life. Since the lamented death of our cousins, Phœbe and Vesta, and recently the irreparable loss I have sustained in the death of Cousin Marcia, we — Miss Bethia and I — have been brought into yet closer and more sympathetic companionship. Aside from the devoted tenderness of Thomas and William, and the — the faithful, if occasionally violent ministrations of Direxia Hawkes, Miss Bethia has been my chief stay and comfort in these troublous days. But I assure you, sir, with my hand on my heart," — Mr. Homer suited the action to the word, — " that nothing of a tender nature has ever passed, or will ever pass, between me and my elegant and valued friend. Yet once more hear me, Brother! It is my firm belief, Pindar, that one image, and one

only, has remained since youth implanted in — in that bosom, sir, to which I allude with the highest respect; that image, sir, I believe to be yours!"

Mr. Homer paused, much moved. Mr. Pindar waved his cloak in protest, but his countenance brightened perceptibly.

"Not so!" he murmured. "Not so! Thunder. Exit Homeless Wanderer, pursued by furies. Brother, I will return to my hated task. Enough! I thank you, but I go."

"Brother, I implore you not so to do!" cried Mr. Homer, earnestly. "I believe that other and happier things are in store for you. I have a vision, sir, of a home replete with elegant comfort. Miss Bethia, though not opulent, is possessed of a comfortable competence — though Mammon is far from my thoughts!" cried Mr. Homer, blushing again. "A home, I say, sir, brightened by

the society of — of Woman, and by every evidence of a refined and cultivated taste. My dear brother, return with me now to the — the bower, if I may so express myself, of our esteemed and valued friend. Miss Bethia urged, I may say, implored, me to bring you back."

"Not so!" murmured Mr. Pindar. "Alarums and exeursions. Exit — "

But Mr. Homer interrupted him, a sudden fire shining in his mild eyes. "Brother Pindar," he cried, "you have many times alluded, since your return, to the Dramatic Moment; you have commented upon the absence of the dramatic element in my composition. But, sir, it is borne in upon me strongly at this instant that a Dramatic Moment is now striking in — in your life and that of our esteemed and valued friend. As you yourself would observe, hark to it, sir!

it strikes; — a — resounds; — a — larums, sir, larums."

The two brothers had risen, and stood facing each other in the moonlight. They waved their arms with an identical gesture; never had they looked so alike. "It larums!" repeated Mr. Pindar, solemnly. Suddenly he seized his brother's hand, and motioned him forward.

"Flourish and a sennet!" he cried. "Possible joy-bells! Brother, set on!"

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER ALL!

And after all, as every one said, everything went off so beautifully that people need not have been disturbed. The Processional Festival Jubilee was given up (really, I think, to Mr. Pindar's relief as well as that of every one else, — except Miss Luella Slocum), and a reception substituted for it; not a Pink Tea, but a dignified and really charming occasion. Mrs. Bliss and Will Jaquith planned it, and the whole village helped to carry it out. The day was perfection, the very crown jewel of the summer: the house was thrown open, and the guests were met in the hall by a Reception Commit-

tee, consisting of the Messrs. Hollopeter, Mr. and Mrs. Bliss, Miss Wax and Mrs. Ware, and Dr. Geoffrey Strong. First, Doctor Strong made a brief address of welcome, which put every one into a holiday humor of twinkling anticipation; and then there were tableaux, framed in the wide low arch of the dining-room door, illustrating the history of the village since the first Darracott, Timothy Philo, settled here in 1680. The First Service, the Indian Massacre (Mr. Pindar superb as King Philip, in full war-paint and feathers, flourishing a real tomahawk from the Collection over the prostrate form of Tommy Candy), the departure of the Quahaug Company of Patriot Militia for Lexington, the women of Quahaug praying for the success of Washington's arms, and so on down to the last, when the Guardian Spirit of the village was represented as mourning for the death of Mrs. Tree. This

was dear Miss Wax's idea, and she besought the Committee so earnestly to carry it out, "as a token of respect for Her we honor," that they had not the heart to refuse. Mrs. Bliss was secretly afraid that it might make people smile; and so it might have done if Annie Lizzie had not looked so sweet, in her white dress and drooping wings (she got them, after all!), that everybody cried instead.

Between the scenes the band, stationed in the garden, "discoursed acceptable strains," as the paper said next day; and, after the final scene, Mr. Homer made a little speech. He had been most unwilling to speak, but everybody insisted that he, and no one else, must actually open the Museum. So the dear gentleman got up, very pink and fluttering, and said that joy and sorrow had woven a mingled wreath to crown this day, but that it was the proudest one of his life,

and that the proudest action of that life was to open the Captain and Mrs. Ethan Tree Museum of Quahaug.

And then — then every one sang the Ode. Mr. Homer had written the words, and Mr. Pindar set them to music, and words and music were printed on white silk and distributed as souvenirs. The two brothers did not know that, when the music began, they took hold of hands, and stood so all through, waving their free arms and bowing their heads in time to the melody, and opening and shutting their mouths; but the rest of the company knew it, and cried so that they could hardly sing.

These are the words:

ODE

FOR THE OPENING OF THE CAPTAIN AND MRS. ETHAN TREE MUSEUM OF QUAHAUG

As smooth the bivalve opes its jaws,
  Admitting crystal flood,
So opes our own Museum its doors
  To all of native blood.
On honored bier we drop the tear,
  And then, with joy agog,
Our village proud doth cry aloud,
  Quahaug! (bang!) Quahaug! (bang!) Quahaug!

Our patroness we fondly bless,
  And likewise honor him
Who filled so free this treasury,
  Then sought the cherubim.
Of objects fair, so rich and rare,
  Description would but clog;
So let us sing till welkin ring,
  Quahaug! (bang!) Quahaug! (bang!) Quahaug!

Captain and Mrs. Ethan Tree
  We honor so this day,
As Muses nine, with fire divine,
  Alone could fitly say.
Yet still each heart would bear its part,
  With this for epilogue:
While life remains we'll praise thy plains,
  Quahaug! (bang!) Quahaug! (bang!) Quahaug!

(The "bangs" were not printed on the souvenirs, but without them one does not get the effect of the cymbals, which really were superb.)

And then the Museum was open, and the village flowed in through the rooms, examining, wondering, praising. It was really a fine collection, and beautifully arranged. Mr. Homer and Tommy Candy had been at work for a month, with much help from the Jaquiths and Annie Lizzie, and everything was classified and marked, and displayed to the best advantage. In one room, the "Captain's room," were the samples of wood, smooth little slabs of ebony, satinwood, violet, leopard, dragon, sandal, and every other known wood, polished till they shone like wooden mirrors. In another were the minerals: rough crystals, rose and amethyst, smoky yellow and clouded brown; nuggets of gold, of silver, of copper; uncut gems of

every variety, from the great ruby that Captain Tree took from the Malay pirate's turban down to the pink and lilac pearls found in our own oysters and mussels in Quahaug harbor.

The carved crystal, jade, ivory, and amber, and the enamels, were displayed in the parlor, and were so skilfully arranged that the character of the room was not changed, only the dim richness accentuated. The light fell softly on bowls and cups of translucent green, on the rounded backs of ivory elephants, on exquisite shapes of agate, jasper, and chalcedony, on robes stiff with gold and crusted with gems; but still it was Mrs. Tree's own parlor, and still the principal thing in it was the ebony chair, with the crutch-stick leaning against it.

The shells, in glass cases, lined the sides of the long room known as the Workshop;

and, as Seth said, "Gosh! if they didn't beat the everlastin' Dutch!"

"Why," he said, turning to Salem Rock, who was behind him in the slowly moving throng that filled the room, "you wouldn't think, to look at all these, that that man had done anything all his life only pick up shells."

"He certingly was the darndest!" replied Salem, soberly.

"I wouldn't use language, Pa!" said Mrs. Rock, who rustled beside him in her best black silk.

"I expect you would, Ma," retorted her husband, "if things came home to you as they do to me this day. They had that way with 'em, both Cap'n and Mis' Tree, that when we had shore leave, and they said: 'Pick up some shells, will you, boys?' that was every livin' thing ary man aboard that ship desired to do. Jerusalem! I can feel

the crick in my back still, stoopin' over them blazin' beaches, pickin' up — Here, Ma! look at this beauty, with the pink and yeller stripes. See them sharp spines, and one of 'em broke off? Wal, that broke off in my foot. It was wropped up in seaweed, and I trod square on it. I don't know as it would be real becomin' to repeat what I said, here and now."

"I don't know as it would be real improvin' to hear it, either, Pa!" replied his consort, calmly. "Let's us move on a mite further, shall we?"

Refreshments were served in the dining-room and on the broad piazza outside it, and here Direxia Hawkes was in her glory. The ladies might sit at the tables, and did so, Miss Bethia Wax pouring tea, Mrs. Bliss coffee, while Miss Slocum and Miss Goby simpered and bridled, twin sirens of the lemonade table; but Direxia's Dramatic

Moment had struck, and she was taking full advantage of it. She had assumed the rigid little bonnet and cape, which were her badge of equality with anybody in the land except "the Family," and she moved among the guests, apparent queen. Annie Lizzie, all smiles and roses, came and went at her bidding, with a tendency to gravitate toward the piazza railing, on which Tommy Candy sat, beaming good-will to all mankind, ladling out frozen pudding and ice-cream from the great freezers.

"Annie Lizzie, Miss Wax ain't eatin' a thing. You tell her to let the folks wait for their tea a spell, and have somethin' herself. Here! take her this orange cream, and tell her I made it, and I expect her to eat it. And — Annie Lizzie, look here! you tell Mr. Homer I don't want he should touch that frozen puddin'. It's too rich, tell him; but he can have all the strawberry and va-

nilla he wants. I ain't goin' to have him sick after this, all worked up as he is."

There were forty-seven different kinds of cake, all "named varieties," as the flower catalogues say. Every housewife in the village had sent her "specialty," from Miss Wax's famous harlequin round down to the Irish christening loaf of good old Mrs. Flanagan, the laundress, who was helping Diploma Crotty wash cups and plates in the kitchen. Mrs. Flanagan refused to come in, spite of Mr. Homer's urgent invitation.

"I thank ye, dear!" she said. "I thank ye kindly, but I'll not come in among the Quality. I wish ye well, Mr. Homer. May no dog ever bite ye but mine, and I'll kape a cat!"

Through the crowd, here and there, moved Mr. Homer and Mr. Pindar, bowing and smiling, waving and flapping, happiest of all the happy throng. Under the genial sun

of cheer and encouragement that had been shining on him during the last two weeks, since the Procession had been given up, Mr. Pindar had grown less and less abrupt and jerky, and more and more like his brother; and the village readily accorded him a share of the benevolent affection with which they regarded Mr. Homer.

"I always said there warn't a mite of harm in Home," said Seth Weaver, "and I begin to think there ain't none in Pindar, either. They come out the same nest, and I expect they're the same settin' of aigs, if they be speckled different. Hatched out kinder queer chicks, old Mis' Hollopeter did, but, take 'em all round, I dunno but they're full as good as barn-door fowls, and they certingly do better when it comes to crowin'."

"That's right!" said Salem Rock.

And when at last it was over, and, with hand-shakings and congratulations, the tide

of visitors had flowed out through the door and down the garden path, the two brothers stood and looked at each other with happy eyes.

"It has been a great occasion, Brother Pindar!" said Mr. Homer.

"It has!" said Mr. Pindar, fervently. "Flourish of trumpets. Enter Herald proclaiming victory. It has been a Dramatic Moment, sir."

"It has been the happiest occasion of my life!" Mr. Homer went on. "I wish Mother could have been present, Pindar; it would have been a gratification to her; — a — an oblectation; — a — a — but where are you going, my dear brother?"

Mr. Pindar, before replying, cast a glance toward the garden gate, through which at that moment a tall, slender figure was passing slowly, almost lingeringly; then he met his brother's eye hardily.

"Brother Homer," he said, and, though he blushed deeply, his voice was firm and cheerful, "I am going to see Bethia home!"

CHAPTER XVI.

MARRIAGE BELLS

The village certainly had never seen a summer like this. People had not stopped talking of the Celebration, when the news of Miss Wax's engagement to Mr. Pindar Hollopeter set the ball of conversation rolling again. Everybody was delighted; and Mrs. Weight was not the only lady in the village who secretly hoped that, now Pindar had set him the example, Homer would see his way to following it, and would provide him with a helpmeet, "one who had ben through trouble and knew how to feel for him."

Mr. Pindar was an ardent wooer, and

pressed for an early marriage; indeed, there seemed no reason for delay. They were to live at the "Wax Works," and Mr. Pindar was to give lessons in elocution, and also on the flute and hautboy, if pupils could be found. Miss Bethia sighed gently, and told Mr. Pindar he was too impetuous; but she finally yielded, and they were married quietly one day, in the quaint, pleasant parlor, the bride dignified and gracious in lavender satin, and the bridegroom resplendent in white waistcoat and pearl-colored tie. He had a brand-new flyaway cloak for the occasion, and could hardly be persuaded to lay it aside during the ceremony, for, as he said, it assisted him in expression, sir, in expression.

Mr. Homer was best man, and never was that usually lugubrious part more radiantly filled. He accompanied the whole service in dumb show, bowing and waving in re-

sponse to every clause; and Geoffrey Strong declares that when he came forward to give the bride away, he heard Mr. Homer murmur "until death do us part," in happy echo of his brother's response.

Then the bridal pair went off on a bridal trip, and the village shouted and cheered after them; and Mr. Homer went home and wept tears of joy on the back porch.

Amid the general rejoicing, one face was grave, or smiled only a perfunctory smile when occasion required it; this was the face of Thomas Candy. It was such an extraordinary thing for Tommy to be grave on any festive occasion that Mr. Homer noticed it, and took him gently to task, as they sat on the aforesaid porch that evening. "Thomas," said the little gentleman, "you appear pensive. You have not seemed to enjoy, as I expected, this festival; this — a — halcyon, I might almost say, millennial

day. Is there any oppression on your spirits, my dear young friend?"

Tommy rumpled his black hair, and cast a look at Mr. Homer, half-whimsical, half-sorrowful. "I s'pose it's all right, sir!" he said, slowly. "Of course it's all right if you say so; but — the fact is, I'd planned otherwise myself, and I s'pose there ain't any one but thinks his own plan is the best. The fact is, Mr. Homer, I hoped to see Miss Wax in this house, instead of Mr. Pindar bein' in hers."

"Indeed, Thomas!" said Mr. Homer. "How so?"

"There's no harm in speakin' of it now, as I see," said Tommy. "Fact is, Mr. Homer, you need somebodys else in this house beside Direxia; some woman, I mean, to make things as they should be for you. Direxia's fine, and I think everything of her, but she's old, and — well, there! there'd

oughter be somebodys else, that's all, if 'twas only to keep the rest of 'em off; and there was only one in this village that I could see anyways suitable, and that was Miss Wax. So I picked her out, and got my mind made up and all, and then along come Mr. Pindar and whisked her off under our noses, so to say. I've nothin' against Mr. Pindar, he's all right; but it was a disappointment, Mr. Homer, and I can't make believe it wasn't. There ain't another woman in this village that Mis' Tree would see set over this house," said Tommy Candy, with simple finality.

Mr. Homer smiled, and patted Tommy's arm cheerfully. "Things are much better as they are, Thomas," he said; "far better, I assure you. Besides, I have other thoughts — a — fancies — a — conceptions, in regard to this house; thoughts which, I fancy, would not have been disapproved by — as my brother's bride says, by Her we honor.

I have felt as you do, my young friend, the want of — a — gracious and softening influence, — in short, the influence of Woman, sir, in this house; but this influence has suggested itself to me in the guise of youth — of — a — beauty; of — a — the morning of life, sir, the morning of life. I have thought — fancied — in short, — how would you like, sir, to see our charming neighbor across the way established in this house?"

Tommy looked at him, stupefied. "Mrs. Weight!" he cried.

But Mr. Homer waved the thought away indignantly. "No, no, Thomas! how could you suppose — not for an instant! — in fact, it was partly with a view to removing her from — sordid and sinister surroundings, that this idea suggested itself to me. What would you say to Annie Lizzie, Thomas?"

Mr. Homer beamed, and bent forward,

rubbing his hands gently, and trying to see Tommy's face through the gathering dusk.

Tommy grew very pale.

"Annie Lizzie!" he said, slowly.

"Annie Lizzie!" repeated Mr. Homer, with animation. "I have watched that young person, Thomas, since her early childhood. I have seen her come up as a flower, sir, in an arid waste; as a jewel of gold in a — But I would not be discourteous. To remove this sweet creature from uncongenial surroundings; to transplant the blossom to more grateful soil, if I may so express myself; to beds of amaranth and moly — I speak in metaphor, sir; to see it unfold its vermeil tints beneath the mellow rays of — a — the tender passion — would give me infinite gratification. It would be my study, sir, to make her happy. What do you — how does this strike you, my dear young friend? But perhaps I have been too

sudden, Thomas. Take time, sir. Consider it a little."

Thomas Candy rose slowly and painfully. "Thank you, sir!" he said, speaking slowly and steadily. "I will take a little time, if you please. It is — rather sudden, as you say."

Leaning heavily on his stick, the young man walked slowly down the garden path, and stood by the garden gate, looking across the way.

Annie Lizzie! Annie Lizzie marry Mr. Homer! the thought was monstrous. Annie Lizzie, only seventeen, a little soft, sweet rose, his own little sweetheart. Good heavens! could such a thing exist even as a dream in any human brain?

Then other thoughts came; ugly thoughts, which forced their way to the front in spite of him. Mr. Homer was rich now, rich and kind and generous. Women liked money,

people said: Annie Lizzie had been bitter poor all her life, had never had a penny to call her own; might she be tempted? And, if she were, had he the right to stand in her way? Was he sure, sure, that her love for him, the love that he had taken for granted as he took the sunlight, would stand the test?

Faster and uglier came the hateful thoughts; he could almost see them as visible forms, with wicked, sneering faces. Was this why she had been so attentive to Mr. Homer of late, running in and out of the house on this or that pretended errand, coaxing Direxia to let her help with the work, begging a flower from the garden, a root from the vegetable border? He had never doubted that it was on his own account she came. Was she false and shallow, as well as sweet and soft and —

Tommy Candy never knew how long he

stood there at the garden gate, watching the house across the way, where a slender shape flitted to and fro in the lamplight. But by and by he struck his stick into the gravel and came back with a white set face, and stood before Mr. Homer, who was rocking happily in his chair and repeating the "Ode to a Nightingale."

"Mr. Homer," he said, and at the sound of his voice the little gentleman stopped rocking and looked up in alarm: "when it comes to things like this, it's man to man, I expect. If Annie Lizzie wants to marry you, I won't stand in her way. I'll take myself and my stick off out o' sight somewheres, where she'll never hear of neither one of us again. But if —"

He stopped short; for Mr. Homer had risen to his feet in great agitation, and was waving his hands and blinking painfully through the dusk.

"My dear young friend!" he cried. "My dear but mistaken young friend, you distress me infinitely. You do not think — it cannot be possible that you think that this poor child has — has formed any such — such monstrous conception? If I thought so, I should resign my being, — a — cease upon the midnight, not without pain, but unspeakably the reverse. It is a most extraordinary thing that twice within a single summer I should have been exposed, sir, to a misapprehension of this amazing, this — a — portentous, this — a — unspeakably inauspicious description. I am not a marrying man, Thomas. Though regarding the Sex with the deepest veneration, sir, I have for many years regarded it across a gulf, if I may so express myself; a chasm, sir; a — a — maelstrom of separation, to speak strongly. Your suggestion fills me with pain; with — anguish; with — a — gorgons

and chimera dire — meaning no disparagement to the young person in question. I had thought, Thomas, — I had conceived, — I had formed the apprehension, sir, that she was attached to you, and that you admitted the soft impeachment; that your heart responded to the — a — soft flutings of the tender passion. I thought to see you wedded, and sharing my home, being as son and daughter to me. I — I — I — "

Mr. Homer's voice faltered. But Tommy Candy caught the distressedly waving hands in his.

"Mr. Homer," he cried, with a broken laugh, "don't, sir! don't take on! I'm a fool, that's all, the biggest fool the world holds this minute. I've loved Annie Lizzie ever since I was ten years old, and I believe she has me."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST WORD

"COME back, have they?" said Seth Weaver. Seth was painting the outside of Miss Penny Pardon's shop, and Miss Penny was hopping in and out, hovering about the door like a lame robin, dividing her attention between Seth and the birds.

"Wal, have 'em a good time, did they?"

"Elegant!" replied Miss Penny, joyously. "They had them an elegant time, Seth. Miss Wax — There! look at me! and I said 'Mis' Hollopeter' just as slick when she come in! She was in this mornin', to tell Sister about the latest styles. I thought 'twas real kind of her, with all she

had to think of in her golden joy. Folks *is* so kind, I don't see how it comes to be such a wicked world as some calls it. Well, she told us all about it. They went to Ni-ag'ry Falls first. He was wishful to take her to Washin'ton, but she said Nature come first in her eyes, even before Gov'ment; she has fine thoughts, and an elegant way of expressin' 'em, I always think. There! she said the Falls was handsome! 'twas beyond the power of thought, she said. Ain't you gettin' jest a dite too much red in that trimmin', Seth?"

"I guess not!" said Seth. "You don't want it to look like you was advertisin' a new brand of mustard, do ye? Where else did they go?"

"They went to New York," said Miss Penny. "It was there she see the styles. Went to the theatre, and to Central Park, and walked down Fifth Avenue; and his

friends give them a testimonial dinner, and — oh, it was lovely to hear her tell about it. I declare, I should like to go to New York some day myself. Big sleeves is comin' in again; not that you care about that, Seth, but Sister was real pleased to know it. And Mr. Pindar has commenced to flesh up some already, Mis' Hollopeter says. He was as poor as a split flounder, you know: hadn't ben nourished good for years, she thinks. There! Men-folks don't know how to feed themselves, seems though, no more nor birds doos. Take that parrot there; you'd think he'd know by this time that fresh paint don't agree with him real well, yet he'll get at it and chaw it every chance he gets, and then has to come to me for doctorin'; it's the same with men-folks, the best of 'em. But Mr. Pindar'll get the best of victuals from now on!" Miss Penny concluded with an emphatic nod.

"She don't want to feed him too high all of a suddin," said Seth, drawing his brush carefully round a window-casing. "He might go the way of Job Joralemon's hoss."

"What way was that?" asked Miss Penny, pausing with a cage in her hand. "Who is Job Joralemon? I don't know as I ever heard of him."

"He was a man over to Tinkham Corners," said Seth. "Meanest man in them parts, where they get the gold medal for meanness every year, some say. Come along a man one day, travellin' man, lookin' for a hoss to buy. His hoss had died, or run away, or ben stole, or somethin', I dono what. Anyways, he heard Job had a hoss to sell, and come to look at him. He warn't much of a one to look at, — the hoss, I mean, though Job warn't no Venus, neither; but this man, he thought likely he could fat him

up and drive him a spell, till he got through his business, and then sell him for a mite more than he give for him. Wal, he took the hoss — he was stayin' at Rowe's Tavern over there — and give him a good solid feed, hay and grain, and then started out to drive on to the next town. Wal, sir, — ma'am, I should say, — quick as he got out the yard, that hoss started on the dead run; man couldn't hold him any more than you could a yearlin' steer. He run like wild-fire a little ways, and then he clum over a fence, buggy and all, — stump-fence it was, — and then he fell down, and rolled over, and died, then and there. The man collected himself out of the kindlin's, and looked round, and see old Rowe, the tavern-keeper, comin' up, grinnin' all over.

"'What does this mean?' the man hollers out, mad as hops. 'What kind of a hoss do you call this?' he says.

"Old Rowe kinder grunts. 'I call that a sawdust hoss,' he says.

"'Sawdust Granny!' says the man. 'What d'ye mean by that?'

"'Wal!' says old Rowe. 'Fact is, Job's ben in the habit of feedin' sawdust to that hoss, and keepin' green goggles on him so's he'd think 'twas grass. Come to give him a good feed, ye see, and 'twas too much for him, and car'd him off.'

"So what I say is, you tell Mis' Hollopeter she wants to be careful how she feeds Pindar up, that's all."

"Seth Weaver, if you ain't the beat!" exclaimed Miss Penny. "I believe you made that up right here and now. Ain't you ashamed to tell such stories?"

"Not a mite! not a mite!" said Seth, comfortably. "Take more'n that to shame me. Ask Annie Lizzie if it don't. Here she comes along now. Ain't she a pictur'?"

Annie Lizzie came blossoming along the street in her pink calico dress; her pink sunbonnet was hanging on her shoulders, and her soft dark hair curled round her face just for the pleasure of it. She was swinging a bright tin pail in her hand; altogether the street seemed to lighten as she came along it.

"Hello, Annie Lizzie!" said Seth, as she came up to the shop. "Comin' to see me, ain't ye?"

"I guess not!" said Miss Penny. "I expect she's come to see me, ain't you, Annie Lizzie? I've got a new piece of ribbin in, jest matches your dress, and your cheeks, too."

Annie Lizzie dimpled and smiled shyly. "I'd love to see it, Miss Penny," she said; "but first I come with a message for Mr. Weaver."

"Then I'll go and feed the rest of them

birds," said Miss Penny. "There! hear 'em hollerin' the minute I say 'feed'? They are the cutest!"

She vanished into the shop, and Seth looked up at the young girl with a friendly twinkle. "Back stairs again, Annie Liz?" he asked. "I expect to get at 'em to-morrow, honest I do."

"No, sir, 'twasn't the stairs this time," said Annie Lizzie, looking down. "Ma didn't know I was comin', or she might have said something. I come with a message from Tommy, Mr. Weaver. He wanted to know could you spare him some white paint."

"What does he want of white paint?" asked Seth.

"Wants to paint the front gate," replied Annie Lizzie.

"Sho!" said Seth. "The front gate was painted only last fall. There ain't no need to paint it ag'in for three years."

"I know!" said the girl, patiently. "But all the same he's goin' to paint it, and he wants you should put somethin' in it so's it won't dry."

"So's it *will* dry, you mean!" corrected Seth. "Tell him I won't do it. Hastenin' white paint's like hastenin' a mud-turtle; it's bad for his constitution, and *then* he don't get anywheres. White paint has to dry slow, or it's no good. You tell Tommy that, and tell him he'd oughter know it, much as he's hung round my shop."

"He doos know it!" said Annie Lizzie, in her cooing voice. "He don't want it to dry, Mr. Weaver."

"Don't want it to dry!" repeated Seth.

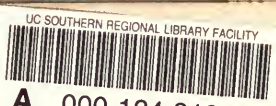
"No, sir. He said I might tell you, so's you'd understand; he knew you wouldn't let it go no further, Mr. Weaver. Fact is, he wants to keep folks away for a spell, so's Mr. Homer can get rested up. He's real

wore out with all these celebrations and goin's on, and he has so many callers he don't have no chance to live hardly. So Tommy thought if he could paint the gate, and keep on paintin' it, with a good paint that lasted wet, you see, it would — Well, what he means is, — there couldn't anybody get in but what had pants on. It's a narrow gate, you know."

"I know," said Seth, with a grim twinkle. "I see. That's Tommy Candy all over. Tell him I'll fix him up an article will do the business; he needn't have no fears. But how about them little pink petticuts of yourn, Annie Lizzie? I dono as Tommy is so special anxious to keep them out, is he?"

The pink of Annie Lizzie's dress was surely not a fast color, for it seemed to spread in a rosy cloud over her soft cheeks, up, up, to the soft rings of hair against her forehead.

"Direxia's real good to me," she said, simply. "She lets me come in the back gate."

THE END.

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